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TRUE WEST

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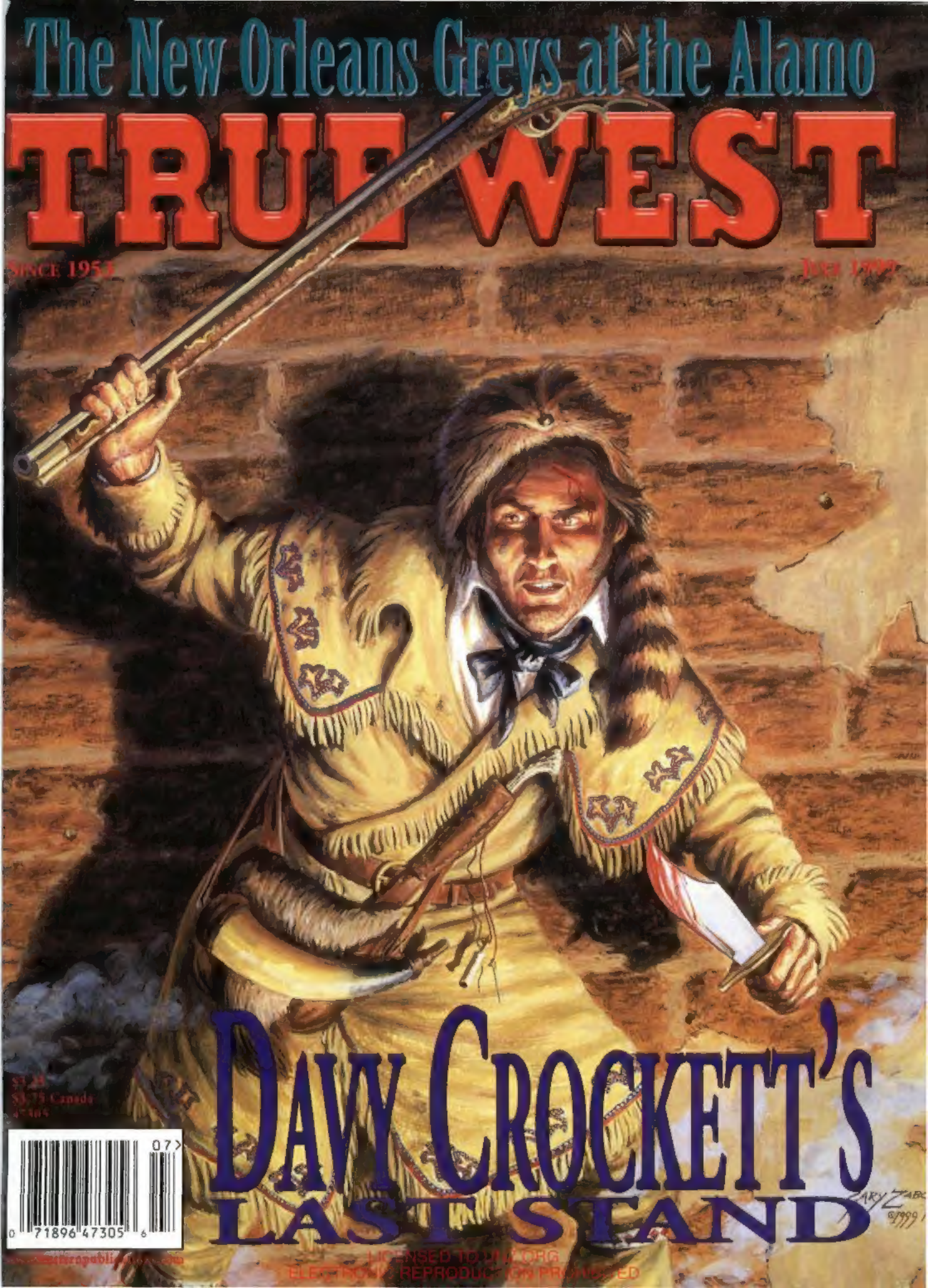

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Our Cover

Crockett Cornered
By Gary Zaboly

FEATURES

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10 **The New Orleans Greys in the Texas Revolution.** *By Gary Brown.* Utilizing the cover of darkness and unconventional, small-unit tactics, the New Orleans Greys assault San Antonio de Bexar with one objective in mind: The Alamo.

18 **The Case for David Crockett.** *By Thom Hatch.* Under what circumstances did David Crockett die at the Alamo mission on March 6, 1836? Swinging his flintlock rifle in a desperate stand against an overwhelming force, or surrendering meekly and meeting his end by execution?

26 **Montana Dream Ranch.** *By Bernice Karnop.* Mining millionaire William Child dreamed of someday becoming a gentleman farmer, and realized that vision with a massive Montana spread.

31 ***True West* Legends: Charles B. McKinney.** *By Chuck Parsons.* Enlisting under Leander McNelly, seventeen-year-old Charlie McKinney rides to fame with the legendary Texas Rangers.

39 **Ben Thorn: Gold Rush Lawman.** *By John Boessenecker.* Long before the legendary antics of Wyatt Earp and Pat Garrett, California was a hotbed of lawlessness and lawmen.

46 **Edward Burleson: A Man of Blood.** *By David F. Crosby.* After his grandfather is murdered by Indians, finding and killing Indians becomes an obsession for Texan Edward Burleson.

43 **Wreck and Ruin on the Katy.** *By Nancy M. Peterson.* The owners of the Missouri, Kansas & Texas railroad not only financed and orchestrated the collision of two trains, they invited 30,000 people to watch, with disastrous results.

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July 1999, Volume 46, Number 7. TRUE WEST (ISSN 0041-3615) is published monthly by Western Publications, 205 W. 7th, Suite 201C, P.O. Box 2107, Stillwater, OK 74076-2107. Single copies: $3.25, plus $1.75 shipping/handling. U.S. subscription rate is $27.95 per year (12 issues per year); $49.00 for two years (24 issues). Canada and Mexico, please add $5.00 per year to U.S. rate to cover extra handling and postage. All other non-U.S. countries, add $7.00 per year. Please provide payment in U.S. funds drawn on a U.S. bank; personal checks, bank money orders, or cashier's checks drawn on foreign banks are not acceptable, nor is the national currency, unless the total payment is sufficient to cover all bank clearing and foreign exchange charges. Periodical postage paid at Stillwater, OK 74074, and at additional mailing offices.

Canadian GST Registration Number R132182866.

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From the Editor

Howdy, ya'll!

Sometimes it takes a big dog to save a puppy, and a big dog recently found a home in quiet, historic Lincoln, New Mexico.

As anyone who has visited Lincoln since Halloween of 1998 can attest, the town was seriously lacking one of its most well-known and popular assets: The Lincoln County Heritage Trust.

Formed in the late 1970s by a group of concerned citizens with a love of history, the Trust, after many trials and financial tribulations, finally closed its doors October 31, 1998.

The Trust was comprised of a museum complex, bookstore, a few historic buildings and homes, and a research library that houses, among other things, the Philip J. Rasch Collection and Western Library. The museum has been home to many relics of the Lincoln County War and local Apache and Spanish history, including weapons and personal effects reportedly belonging to Billy the Kid. The crown jewel of the Trust, on loan from descendants of Dan Dedrick until last October, was the only authentic tintype photo of Billy the Kid.

Early this year, good fortune, in the form of the Hubbard Foundation, smiled upon Lincoln. The Hubbard Foundation, most familiar to those in southern New Mexico as the folks who run Ruidoso Downs' racetrack and the Museum of the Horse, assumed the assets of the financially troubled Lincoln County Heritage Trust. The Lincoln Museum doors opened again on April 1, 1999, much to the delight, and relief, of locals and visitors alike.

Lincoln, as anyone familiar with the town will agree, is a historic diamond in the rough. Most of the buildings date back to the Lincoln County War and are still intact; if Billy the Kid were to ride into town today, he would undoubtedly recognize the place immediately. (A feat Brushy Bill Roberts failed to do, by the way.)

It is all still there. The Lincoln County courthouse, originally the Murphy-Dolan Store and site of Billy the Kid's spectacular 1881 escape, offers tourists a chance to walk in history's footsteps. You can look out the upstairs window at the spot where Bob Olinger was dropped by a shotgun blast from the hands of Billy the Kid. Across the street, the Wortley Hotel awaits overnight visitors, and just down the street, the old Tunstall Store is still stocked with original goods from the 1870s. Behind the Tunstall Store are the graves of John Henry Tunstall and Alexander McSween, whose deaths effectively started, and ended, the Lincoln County War.

At the time of the Trust's demise, visitors had to pay two fees to visit these buildings; one to the Trust, another to the State of New Mexico. Now, one seven-dollar fee gets you in to all of the buildings on the tour, thanks to the Hubbard Foundation and the State of New Mexico, working hand-in-hand for the cooperative good of the town and the convenience of the tourists.

The Lincoln County Heritage Trust is an excellent starting point for those interested in historic Lincoln. It features a variety of exhibits on Billy the Kid, the Lincoln County War, Native American history, and the Buffalo Soldiers, who once called nearby Fort Stanton home. For more information on ongoing exhibits and tours, contact The Lincoln County Heritage Trust, PO Box 98, Lincoln, New Mexico 88338, (505) 653-4025. Or contact The Hubbard Museum of the American West, PO Box 40, Ruidoso Downs, New Mexico 88346, (800) 263-5929.

Marcus Huff

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JIM BROWNING REMEMBERED

This morning I received a letter from Nancy Samuelson, and she advised me of the passing of Jim Browning. She also mentioned you did a fine tribute to him in the May issue of *True West*. The magazine arrived with the same mail as Nancy's letter, and I immediately read your editorial. She was right, and I thank you for the outstanding tribute you paid to a fine man, historian, writer, and NOLA member.

Jim was my friend. I still recall when he walked up to me at the NOLA Rendezvous in Vernal, Utah. I had no idea who he was, but with a big and friendly grin he extended his hand and said, "Mr. Edwards, I am Jim Browning, and I have read everything you have ever written, and you do a good job." I replied, "Thank you for the compliment, but you haven't read everything I have written." I went on to explain I had written a number of pieces for local historical societies which were unknown to him. This was the start, and over the years I saw him at NOLA Rendezvous and even when he came through Bakersfield a couple of times. Over the years, we spent several hours discussing our favorite topic—western history. I always looked forward to seeing him.

I was under the impression he was doing well, or at least better. I received a change of address card from him but he didn't answer my letters. I knew he was ill and didn't expect a return. The last time I talked with Bob DeArment and Nancy Samuelson he was doing better and I was encouraged. It was a surprise when I learned he was gone. I will miss him.

Again, you shot the target plumb center in your obit about Jim, and I appreciate your sentiments. In any way you look at it, we lost a top-notch man.—*Harold Edwards, Bakersfield, California.*

SADDLE PALS **By Graham Ward**

OLDEN TYMES, YUH EVER WONDER WHAT MAKES SOME COWBOYS WANT TO COMPETE IN RODEOS?
I RECKON BECAUSE THEY GET A FEW BUCKS OUT OF IT!
GRAHAM WARD
©ROUNDUP GRAPHICS

I thought your tribute to Jim Browning was very fine. He was a great guy and all of us in the western history business are going to miss Jim a great deal. I was very surprised to hear of his death. I had been in fairly close touch and was under the impression his health problems were improving. I wrote to his sister and she said he took a turn for the worse in January, went to the hospital, and never came home.

The last two or three issues of *True West* have been some of the best ever. I have read them from cover to cover, which I do not often do with any magazine. You are getting great stories in there; keep up the good work.—*Nancy Samuelson, Eastford, Connecticutt.*

I received the May issue of *True West* today. I think you did a splendid job in an appropriate obituary for Jim Browning. I had reason to call Nancy Samuelson today as well and she mentioned she thought it was a very nice piece.

I also thought Chuck Hornung did a great piece on Doc and Wyatt. What with Dennis McCown's piece

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on Helen Beulah, Robert DeArment's Denver gamblers, and on and on, this is a really good issue. You have done yourself proud! Keep up the great work.—*Chuck Parsons, Luling, Texas.*

Civil War Era and Bears

We are one of your "shadow" or "ghost" readers through the courtesy of the National Library Service. I am blind, and both me and my guide dog, Dozer, enjoy your magazine. I am very interested in the Civil War era, and Dozer leans more towards animal stories, especially about bears. Thank you for an excellent magazine.—*Millard Cluck and Dozer, via the Internet.*

Auction Case

Last year at an auction, I purchased a case of 1960s and 1970s *Frontier Times* and *True West* magazines. I have spent a year reading them and enjoying every story. I just subscribed to your magazines and look forward to receiving new issues.—*Rhoda Nicol, via the Internet.*

George Bent

There was an inaccuracy in my article "George Bent: Torn by History" that appeared in the May issue of *True West*. I thought that I would preempt any critical letters and send you a correction now.

On page 42, the heading in bold print at the top of the page reads:

> Bent endured the torture of the Sioux sun dance as he thrust skewers through slits in his skin, then dangled by rawhide ropes hanging from the top of the sacred medicine lodge.

I'm afraid that information is incorrect, and it probably resulted from the too-vague wording of one of my sentences from page 41 that reads:

> He was present [as an observer] in June when the Southern Cheyennes, the Dog Soldier band of the Cheyennes, the Arapahoes, and Spotted Tail's band of Sioux gathered along the Republican River

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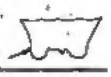
for the annual Sioux sun dance. The young warriors from the north [meaning the Sioux] endured unimaginable torture as they thrust skewers through slits in their skin, then dangled by rawhide ropes hanging from the top of the sacred medicine lodge.

There is no evidence that Bent ever participated in the sun dance ceremony as one of the supplicants, but he was impressed by their dedication to their religion, as he was amazed by the generosity they displayed during the ensuing gift-giving rituals.

I apologize for any confusion that may have resulted from this.—*John R. Sweet, via the Internet.*



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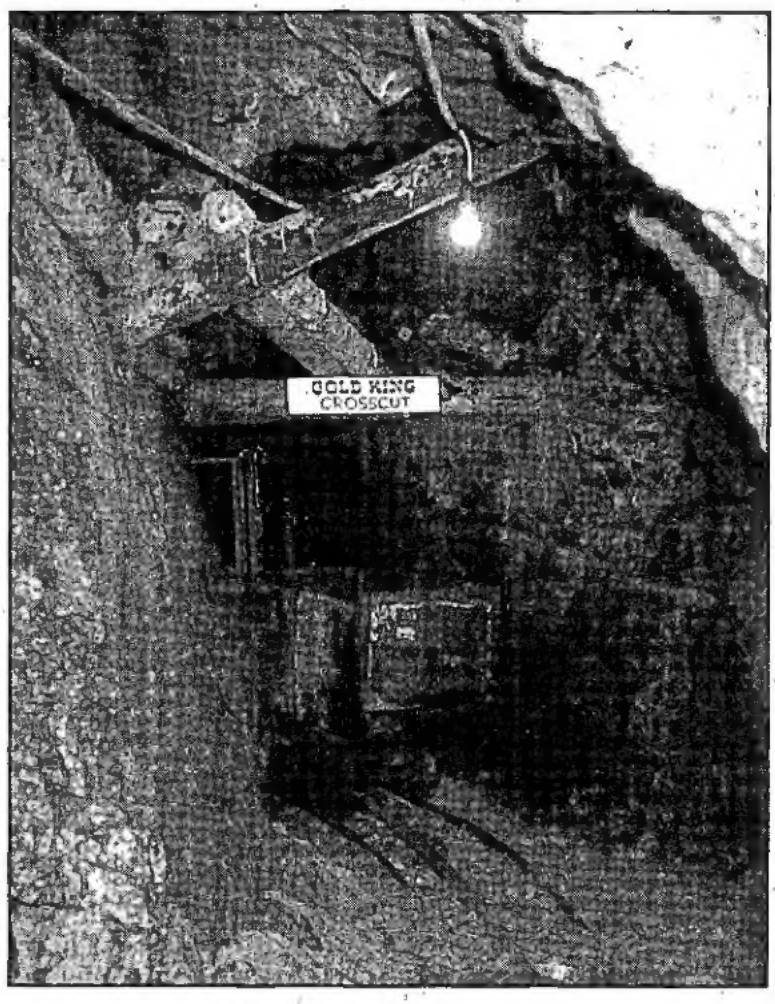
The Mollie Kathleen

By Charles Robinson III



Author's Collection

A car waits on its tracks around the bend of a crosscut tunnel through a vein of ore.

For more than seven decades, beginning in 1892, miners descended the 1,000-foot shaft into the Mollie Kathleen Gold Mine, bringing out millions of tons of ore-bearing rock from the heights overlooking Cripple Creek, Colorado.

Today, visitors descend into the shaft in the same "man skip" cages used by the miners when the Mollie Kathleen was yielding its gold. The tour helps them relive the days when thousands of people poured into the Pike's Peak region in one of the continent's last great gold rushes.

The Mollie Kathleen strike is named after Mollie Kathleen Gortner, who discovered a gold outcropping on the site while hiking in 1892. Not only was it one of the earliest claims discovered in the Cripple Creek area, but it is also believed to be the first claim in history registered by a woman in her own name. The mine shipped its first load of gold ore for processing only two days after the first shipment from the El Paso Lode, the first major producing mine in the district. These and other claims prompted some to say that the Cripple Creek-Victor goldfields were "the richest 24 square miles on earth."

Unlike other gold rushes, Cripple Creek got off to a slow start. The first gold, a "float" or a piece of rock broken off a gold-bearing outcropping, was discovered in 1878 by ranch hand Robert Womack, who had some mining experience.

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Believing the mountains had rich deposits, he began searching for the source, but few believed he would find anything valuable, Womack staked his first claim in Poverty Gulch, near what would become Cripple Creek, in 1886, and a second claim—the El Paso—in partnership with Dr. John Grannis, a local dentist, in 1890. Even so, it was two years before the Cripple Creek district began to attract other claimants, including Mollie Kathleen Gortner. By then, people realized something big was happening, and the Cripple Creek-Victor Gold Camp quickly jumped to over 500 claims. By the end of the century the population had risen from about thirty people to 50,000.

Mining continues in the Cripple Creek District, where today's Cripple Creek-Victor Gold Mining Company practices surface mining to yield 200,000 ounces a year. An entire mountain is being blasted level, and trucks move 75,000 tons of rock a day, compared to the four or five tons that an underground miner could take out in the old Mollie Kathleen. Nevertheless, the Mollie Kathleen preserves the tradition of underground mining for visitors.

Unlike the dirt mining of California and elsewhere, Colorado's hard rock mining requires very little in the way of wooden shoring. As they lead visitors through the galleries, the guides—themselves retired underground miners—explain that the rock itself provides the support. Pneumatic drills punched holes for dynamite to blast out the ore and extend the tunnels. The drill bits were hollow to allow jets of water through, to turn the rock dust into mud and lessen the danger of inhaling it. Even so, the guides explain that dust masks were essential. As each charge was set off, the miner counted the number of blasts. If six sticks of dynamite led to six blasts, he went back to work. If, on the other hand, he counted less than six, everything stopped while several tons of newly blasted rubble was sorted—rock by rock—until the defective charge was recovered.

In the old days, the ore cars were moved through the tunnels by burros who, once lowered into the mine, never again saw the light of day. In the 1920s, however, burro power was replaced by pneumatic locomotives using Stanley Steamer engines powered by compressed air. The remaining burros were returned to the surface and set free, and their wild descendants can still be spotted in the hills around the mine.

The Mollie Kathleen was an operating mine until well into the 1960s, when economics finally forced it to shut down. As one of the guides explained, "Our only customer at that time was Uncle Sam. We had to sell it to him, and he paid a fixed price that was way below the world market." Tours, which had been offered since 1949, now keep the old mine alive for posterity.

The Mollie Kathleen Mine, which

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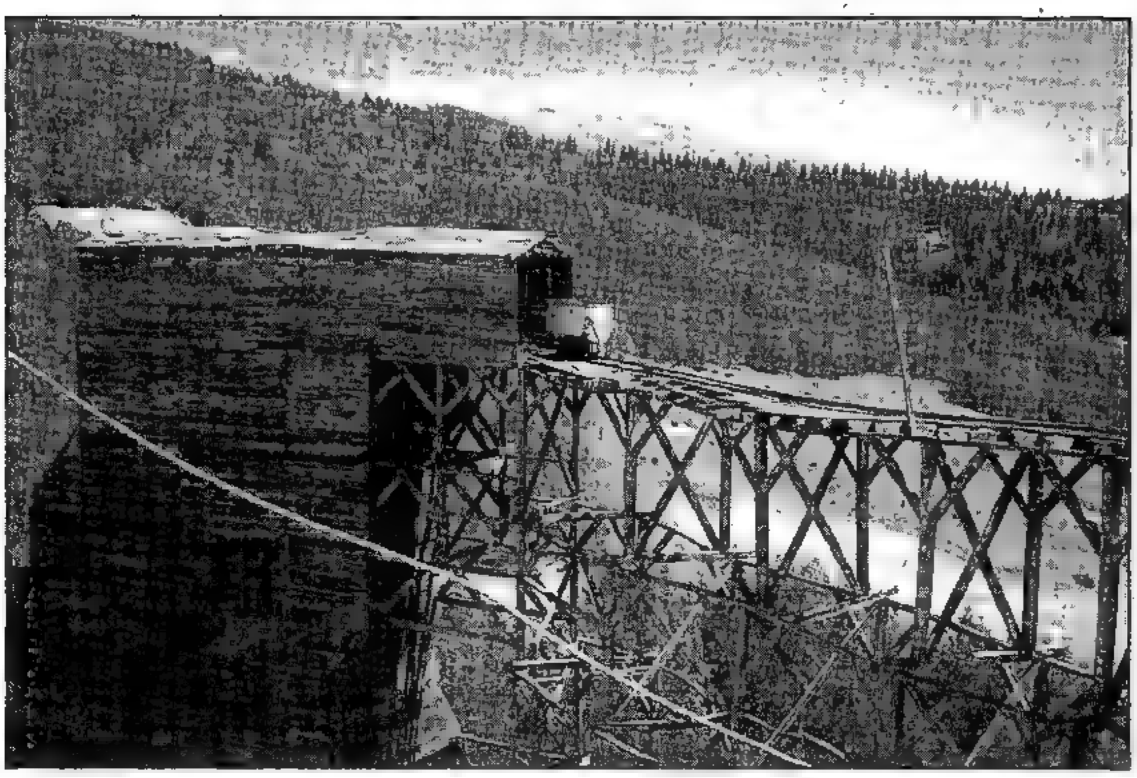

Author's Collection
The most obvious above-ground evidence of the Mollie Kathleen is the tipple, where ore was dumped for shipment to processing.

has been featured in *National Geographic*'s "Visiting Our Past," and in *Reader's Digest*'s "See America" publications, is located on Colorado Highway 67 just before reaching Cripple Creek. Visitors should use Exit 141 on Interstate 25, drive west on U.S. 24 to the town of Divide, then left on Highway 67 for eighteen miles. For more information write Gold Mine Tours Inc., P.O. Box 339, Cripple Creek, Colorado 80813, or call (719) 689-2466.

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The New Orleans

THE TEXAS

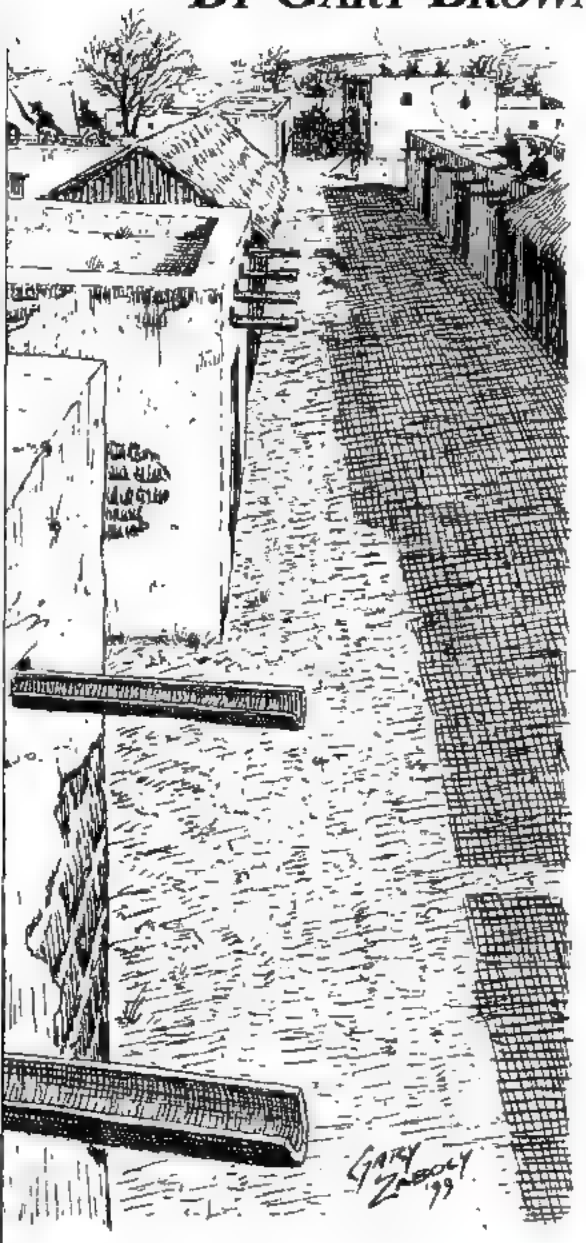
Battle of

Greys in REVOLUTION

San Antonio de Bexar

Excerpted from *Volunteers in the Texas Revolution—The New Orleans Greys*, Republic of Texas Press, 1999.

BY GARY BROWN • ILLUSTRATED BY GARY ZABOLY



Various reasons have been suggested that volunteer units from the United States joined the Texas Revolution in 1835-36. The liberties being taken away from the Constitution of 1824 made for good campfire discussions, but "the promise of a good scrape with the Mexicans" was the primary attraction for many of the volunteers, especially the younger ones.

Such a group came to Texas in 1835. They were an exception to most of the military standards of the Texas army at that time. As a unit, they were born in a New Orleans coffee arcade on October 13, 1835. Only 175 days later, they had been destroyed and only a handful lived to learn of the victory at San Jacinto. During that 175 days they were the premier Texan military unit in the rebellion. They wore uniforms. They carried similar weapons. And they fought.

They led the charge into Bexar during the battle for San Antonio and claimed that settlement for Texas—street by street, house by house, and in the end, hand to hand with the Mexican army. Later, some would again fight hand to hand in defending the Alamo.

At the Battle of Coleto, after effectively engaging a far better equipped and supplied Mexican army, they were forced against their will to surrender. One week later, at Goliad, they were among the first to be marched out unarmed and massacred. It was a short, violent, 175-day unit history. Somehow, at least three of them were found among the rolls after the battle and victory at San Jacinto.

Their unit history is one of bravery, courage, and fighting skill. But it was also one of poor leadership, internal political division, and terrible logistics and supply. These young men carried ideals—no matter how misplaced—into the revolution. They were ruthless in battle yet compassionate in victory. While they lived, they were formidable. When they died, they left a legacy of valor and courage.

They were known as the New Orleans Greys, but their story has remained relatively unknown.

It is estimated that between 120 and 130 men volunteered for service in New Orleans. Plans were made for one unit to travel north by boat to Alexandria, Louisiana, then march across the Sabine River to Nacogdoches in Texas. They would then cross the Texas prairie to Bexar, otherwise known as San Antonio, where the rebels were laying

siege to the Mexican army in the colonial hamlet and old Alamo mission.

The other company would sail on the schooner *Columbus* from New Orleans to the Texas port of Velasco and then march overland to join the first company at Bexar.

The New Orleans Greys would, in the future, merge and assume other "greys" titles: San Antonio Greys, Cooke's Greys, and the Mobile Greys, but the two companies organized in New Orleans that October 13 evening were simply the Greys. Their name was derived from the distinctive gray uniforms they were issued. A great deal of debate has centered on the uniforms: the popular historical view has been that they were surplus United States military uniforms—possibly 1825 army fatigue jackets—while other historians claim the clothing was typical of common laborers or even slaves.

The Greys included men from eighteen states as well as members from England, Ireland, Germany, Wales, Scotland, Upper Canada, and Nova Scotia. Thus the Greys were truly neither "New Orleans" nor "Louisianian" nor even completely "American."

Youth seems to be one recurring factor when reviewing the rolls. Some volunteers, however, had established business and personal histories prior to that October 13 evening at the arcade.

Robert C. Morris of New Orleans was a military man, having served several years in the Louisiana Guards prior to enlistment in the Greys. He and Seminole War veteran Robert Mussleman represented the few Greys who had formal military backgrounds. John Cook was an experienced artilleryman with service as a British marine. Most volunteers, however, appear to have had little or no prior military experience.

William Gordon Cooke was a druggist from Virginia. Michael Cronican had apprenticed as a newspaperman in Massachusetts and was a skilled printer. Stephen Dennison, an Englishman, was a painter and glasscutter by trade.

There were at least two medical doctors with the Greys, one assigned to each company. William Howell had been a doctor in New York before traveling to New Orleans. Albert Moses Levy, born in the Netherlands but a naturalized U.S. citizen and graduate of medial school at the University of Pennsylvania, was a surgeon attached to the other company of the Greys. At least one of the Greys, William Hunter, was a lawyer.

Francis Johnson had been born in Virginia and educated in Tennessee. Before reporting to New Orleans he had worked as a grocer, miller, constable, miner, and militiaman as well as a surveyor. At thirty-two, he was one of the older Greys. Thomas Lubbock, at seventeen, was working in a New Orleans cotton warehouse when he enlisted.

Julian Harby came to New Orleans from Charleston, South Carolina, where his father had introduced and established the beginnings of Reform Judaism in Charleston and the United States.

Thomas William Ward, a young Irishman who would later be seriously wounded at Bexar, had immigrated to Quebec and then to New Orleans where he was studying engineering and architecture. Herman Ehrenberg, listed as a German, had studied writing and engineering at the University of Jena.

The two companies of Greys left New Orleans that October by different routes but, as planned, both were reunited outside the city of San Antonio de Bexar late in November—elated they had not missed the fighting. That elation, however, was short-lived, as the Greys realized they had traveled from New Orleans to Bexar in time to find a disintegrating Texan army.

After several aborted attempts to storm the city and Mexican forces, a last ditch appeal was made to the few remaining volunteers. A plan was adopted that would require the Texans to enter the city on two parallel streets under cover of darkness while Colonel J C. Neill created a diversionary artillery attack. Ben Milam would command one company and Francis W. Johnson would lead the other, which included most of the New Orleans Greys.

In the early morning hours of December 5, at the signaling sound of the cannon, the Greys and other Texans hesitated in the foggy darkness to gauge the Mexican response. Almost immediately there was shouting and small arms fire, followed by an artillery response. Neill's diversion had succeeded, and the Greys started moving into San Antonio de Bexar.

The Greys entered the city along Soledad Street that ran directly parallel to the San Antonio River. Milam's division simultaneously entered the city one street over, on Calle de Acequia.

The Greys would enter the city on foot and move steadily toward their objective, the Veramendi House near the central quadrangle, and then advance down Soledad Street toward the city's Central Plaza. Single-story, square adobe buildings with their parapets, massive oak doors, and barred, open windows lined both sides of the street.

On at least one occasion, Mexican sentries were observed, but to maintain the element of surprise, the Greys bypassed them in the dark and continued toward the Veramendi House. Their initial entry into the city had succeeded as planned.

The uncontested entry down Soledad Street, however, ended when, approximately two hundred yards from the Veramendi House, their advance was discovered and challenged by Mexican small arms fire from posted sentries. Immediately the Mexican garrison was alerted and opened volleys of grapeshot and canister—some of it being fired from only eighty feet away—and the Greys found themselves completely exposed in the street.

To escape the devastating cannon fire, they beat and kicked in doors of the buildings and charged inside for refuge. Some of the buildings were businesses and warehouses, but many were private resi-

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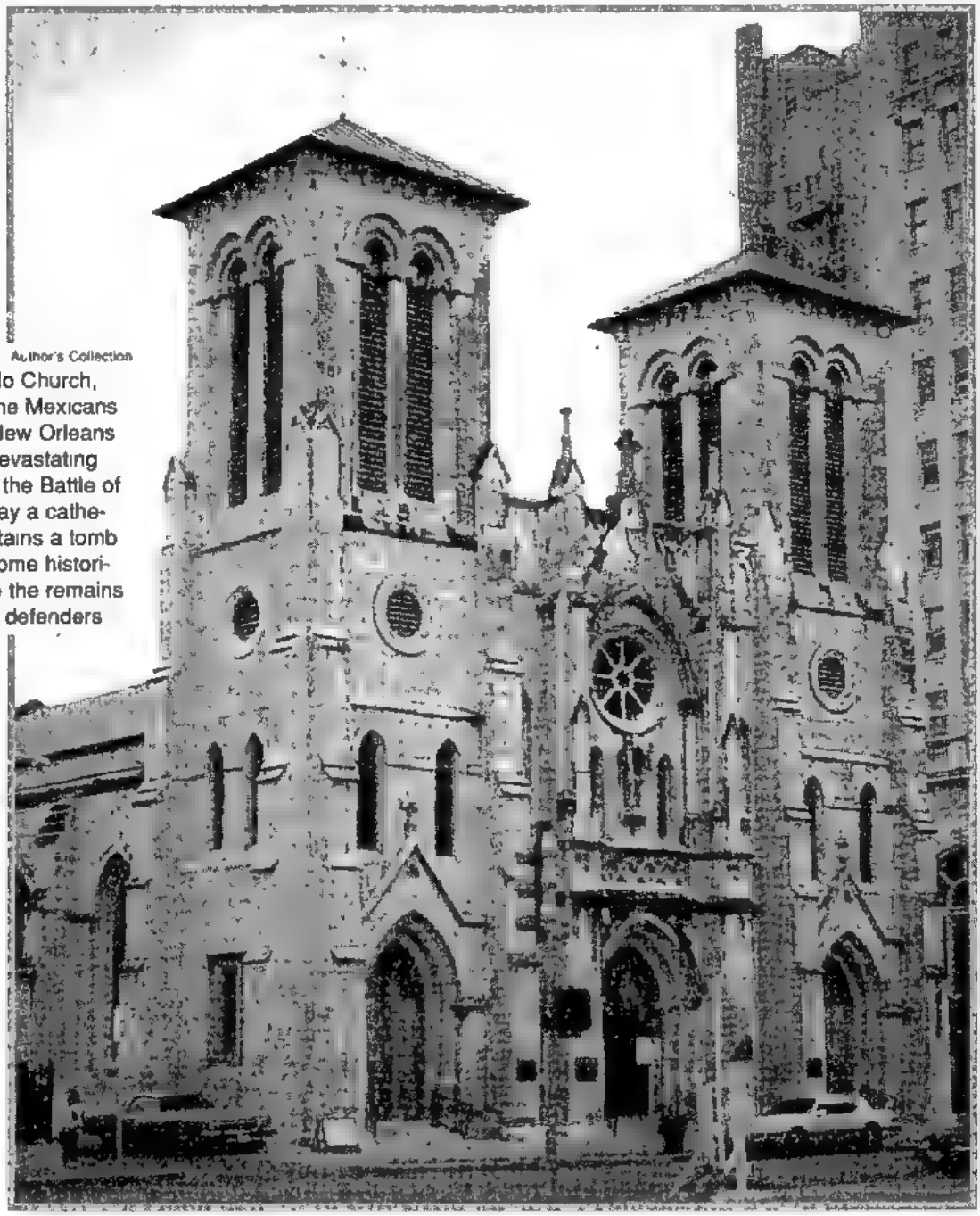
dences whose occupants had just been awakened by the cannon fire. In some of the homes, Mexican soldiers were being quartered and some of the Greys found themselves in hand-to-hand combat at the very beginning of the battle.

Mexican buildings in the 1830s were generally of standard construction. Designed to protect against Indian raids, they were built of adobe brick with walls up to three feet thick. Each room was built like a small fortress with usually one door leading to the street and no interior doors for passage from room to room. Each building usually had at least one large window with heavy bars and wooden shutters.

The roofs were mostly flat and constructed of a layer of logs, often covered with adobe brick. Most of the buildings had low parapets extending two to three feet above the roof and containing drainage spouts of tile or hollowed logs.

In the darkness and fog of that first morning on December 5, the Greys had no idea what to expect as they kicked in doors and occupied buildings. One of the buildings used for protection during those early hours was their strategic objective: the Veramendi House. They found that even after taking refuge in these small fortresses, they were still highly vulnerable to the devastating cannon fire, especially from one piece located about eighty feet away.

Using the limited cover from inside the buildings, the Greys immediately focused on that cannon. The Greys' sharpshooters quickly drove the Mexicans away from the piece, effectively silencing it.



Author's Collection

San Fernando Church, from which the Mexicans shelled the New Orleans Greys with devastating effect during the Battle of Bexar, is today a cathedral and contains a tomb thought by some historians to house the remains of the Alamo defenders

Small arms fire and other cannon fire from the Mexicans stationed in the Alamo and near the Central Plaza in the city continued to pin the Greys down, effectively eliminating any communications between their positions and Milam's division.

Although safe inside their positions, the Greys realized that this security was temporary at best and that they would have to launch a counterattack soon.

Since the Greys at this point were basically an infantry unit, they had to rely upon rifle firepower. A decision was made to occupy the roofs of some of the buildings to elevate their position and take advantage of the low-lying parapets on the buildings they were occupying.

On one building, Greys Second Lieutenant John H. Hall climbed to the roof only to discover the Mexicans had already established rooftop positions. He was immediately wounded.

Other Texans made the same mistake of ascending the rooftops that first morning and nearly all of them suffered the same fate. As the Mexicans intensified the small arms fire onto the rooftops, they also began firing canister and grapeshot from artillery positions. Incoming fire from the bell tower of San Fernando Church was particularly devastating.

In desperation, the Texans began tearing holes in the roofs in order to lower the wounded to safety inside. Once a hole was created, another danger existed: Mexican soldiers were stationed in many of the rooms below.

As the sun rose that cold morning, the Greys found themselves firmly entrenched in the city as far forward as the Veramendi House but they also found themselves isolated under very heavy fire from the Mexicans.

The Greys and other Texans had entered Bexar that morning with each soldier carrying two days' rations and a limited supply of canteen water. The unexpected heavy fighting, trenching, and securing of positions had resulted in most of the food supplies and virtually all of the water being consumed during the first day. Water, in particular, posed a critical problem for the Greys. With Mexican snipers hiding in the brushy area along the banks of the San Antonio River, any attempt to approach the river for water was extremely dangerous.

At one point the Greys were preparing to rush the river for water when a Mexican woman in one of the buildings they were occupying offered to go for them

After the Palm Sunday Massacre in March 1836, the bodies of the Greys and other Texans were partially buried and left to the elements until after the Revolution. Later they were interred near the La Bahia presidio in this mass grave

insisting that the Mexican soldiers would not open fire on one of their own citizens, especially a woman. Against their protests, the woman left the safety of the building to approach the river and, to the Grey's dismay and horror, she was quickly cut down by sniper fire. As several of the Greys attempted to rescue her and return her to the building, others took advantage of the situation to charge the riverbank and fill containers with water.

From this point on, it was obvious that much of the fighting would be house-to-house. As darkness settled over Bexar that night, both Texan divisions took inventory of the day's fighting. The results had been mixed: resistance had been much stronger than anticipated and the fighting had become mired down, although the initial assault on the city had developed almost exactly as planned and the execution of the battle plan had been nearly perfect. Despite the heavy Mexican fire, the Greys were well established in their positions that first night.

A head count indicated that Johnson's division, to which the Greys were assigned, had suffered one dead and six wounded that first day.

As Mexican fire continued intermittently throughout the night, the Greys and other Texans were secure and spent the night fortifying their defenses by filling sandbags, cleaning weapons, and strengthening the lines of communication with Milam's group.

The morning of December 6 dawned cold and crisp. In the early morning hours the Greys discovered that the Mexicans had also been busy overnight fortifying their positions and occupying even more elevated rooftops. Ready to resume the attack, the Greys pressed forward, occupying more buildings and slowly driving closer to the final objective of the central quadrangle. On this, the second day, the fighting intensified and the room-to-room fighting expanded into very heavy hand-to-hand combat.

The fighting this day was particularly dangerous. The closer the Greys moved to the Central Plaza, the stronger the resistance became. Now literally fighting from one room to the next, the Greys used crowbars, axes, knives, hatchets, and any other heavy tools to punch holes in the thick walls. Once a hole was established, another Grey would thrust his rifle through the opening and fire into the adjacent room, not knowing if it were empty or filled with Mexican soldiers. When the rifle barrel was removed to allow reloading, they had to watch that a Mexican weapon was not thrust through from the other side to return the fire.

Slowly the holes would be expanded and finally the Greys would charge into the next room, often finding that Mexican soldiers were waiting there. Then close-quarter, hand-to-hand combat occurred, but often the Mexicans would simply surrender, creating another unanticipated problem: what to do with the captured enemy. As the day ended, the fighting had progressed but at a much slower pace than the Texans had hoped for.

As darkness fell on Bexar on December 6, the Greys found themselves again entrenched under intermittent fire. They once more spent the night fortifying their defenses.

Again, on the dawn of the third day, the Greys discovered that the Mexicans had also continued to fortify their defenses. Of particular concern was a redoubt that had been constructed overnight on the Alamo side of the San Antonio River. In the early daylight, the Mexicans opened cannon fire on the Greys and were silenced only after several Texan sharpshooters succeeded in driving the cannoneers from the pieces.

On this third day, the artillery began to play a pivotal role for the Texans and Greys. It was also on this day that many of the Greys became true artillerymen. And it was at this stage of the fighting that all Texan artillerymen sustained very heavy casualties. All of the artillerymen were wounded, including at least one New Orleans Grey, Private John Cook, who was killed in action. Cook, an Englishman, was one of the few Greys enlisting in New Orleans who had military experience. Formerly, he had been a gunner in the English fleet, and in Texas he had immediately taken his place with the artillery.

Room by room, the fighting continued toward the central quadrangle. Crowbars and axes chopped holes, battering rams were fashioned from scrap wood, and much of the actual combat was hand-to-hand. Progress that afternoon was literally measured in feet and inches.

In the afternoon, Ben Milam called for a meeting of the company commanders near the Veramendi House. At this meeting, a Mexican sniper's bullet dropped him, killing him instantly. Still, the fighting continued, and around seven o'clock that evening another meeting was held. Johnson was elected commander-in-chief to replace Milam, and a New Orleans Grey, Major Morris, was chosen as second-in-command. William Gordon Cooke was placed in charge of leading the Greys.

By ten o'clock that night, an exhausted group of Greys had reached and occupied the Navarro House, where they established night quarters. As in the previous two nights, there was little chance for rest because the enemy was literally next door. The weather remained cold and wet, and the night was spent filling sandbags and preparing weapons for the coming day.

On December 8, the fourth continuous day of fighting, morning dawned cold and wet with intermittent rain. The full moon had been largely blocked by cloud cover. In assessing their position that morning, the Greys realized that they were within fifteen yards of the Central Plaza.

They were entering, they realized, the most dangerous phase of the fighting. The Mexicans had positioned the majority of their garrison in the Central Plaza and the

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Greys' position was open to artillery fire from the Alamo across the river.

Around nine o'clock that morning the soldiers occupying the Navarro House were reinforced by another detachment of New Orleans Greys. The combined force then advanced and occupied Zambrano's Row, which led to the square. At this point, all fighting again became room-to-room and the Greys were again thrust into intense combat.

The Mexicans continued heavy fire by cannon attack during the day but caused little damage. Around five o'clock that afternoon, the Greys launched yet another assault against a building near the Central Plaza. In attacking this building, the familiar room-to-room scenario quickly developed. The Texans chiseled holes in the wall, only to be met by Mexican muskets being fired into their faces. When the Mexicans withdrew their rifle barrels, the Greys would thrust theirs through and return the fire. While the Greys reloaded, the Mexicans would again fire into them. While all of this fire and counter-fire was going on, the Greys with the axes and crowbars continued to chip away and enlarge the holes.

Finally the wall gave way, and the Mexican soldiers retreated into an adjoining room, this time barricading themselves with a heavy wooden door. This fire and counter-fire continued again as the Greys chopped holes in the door and battered it in. At least two Greys sustained minor injuries before the door gave way.

By now it was early evening and the sun had set. The second room, as the Greys cautiously rushed in, was completely dark. Again the Mexicans had retreated to another adjoining room, and the Greys could hear them through the wall. Groping the walls in darkness, they found another door and began battering it down. As they succeeded, they charged into the third room only to find the Mexicans had completely retreated from the house.

Only one more house stood between Cooke's company and the Military Plaza one block over from the Central Plaza. That house was a solidly built stone, not adobe, building called the Priest's House. Occupation of the Priest's House would give the Texans an excellent point of assault on the Central Plaza and the church depot there, which was serving as the Mexican ordnance supply point.

Author's Collection

William Cooke, who assumed leadership of one of the Greys companies during the storming of Bexar, died near Seguin, Texas, in 1847 and is today interred in the Texas State Cemetery in Austin.

Cooke now plotted his battle plan for the attack on the Priest's House. He later wrote that battle casualties had reduced the Greys under his command to only thirty-seven men. The attack on the Priest's House was launched before midnight in the light of the full moon and, as anticipated, was contested fiercely by the Mexicans. This was Cooke's moment of decisive leadership and personal heroism during the battle for Bexar.

The Priest's House was constructed, because of threats of Indian raids, as a small fortress with rifle portholes along the walls. In 1835, it was one of the most secure houses in Bexar.

Cooke knew this assignment was risky. The full moon provided direction for the Greys but also denied them cover in the open street. When their advance stalled, Cooke again assumed leadership. The Greys had succeeded in occupying the Priest's House but the success had been costly. At this point the Greys were at the foremost position of all the Texas forces and were virtually face to face with the heaviest concentration of Mexican soldiers in the Central Plaza.

Immediately, the Mexicans swarmed to the area of the plaza nearest the Priest's House and two six-pounders—one only about six feet from the hole by which the Greys had entered the house—were

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concentrated on their position. Not only were the Greys under devastating fire, they were also effectively cut off from the other Texan forces and isolated with no hope for reinforcements. Knowing they could not sustain the artillery bombardment long, Cooke ordered a charge against the plaza. He later recorded:

> Immediately on gaining entrance we rushed upon the Square. One piece of Artillery was placed immediately in front of the door through which we entered at the distance of two or three yards, this we took possession of and attempted to pull in the house, but by that time the fire from the enemy became so severe, we were compelled to retire to the house after spiking the piece, in performing which, one of my men [John Belden] lost his eye from a musket ball—On regaining the house we barricaded the doors, Windows, passages [etc.] as well as we could—which (having lost our sand bags)—we accomplished. But very imperfectly—using our blankets, shirts, the library of the priest [etc.] for that purpose....

Spiking a cannon involved wedging a slender metal "spike" into the vent at the rear of the barrel and snapping it off. This prevented any subsequent use of the cannon since the primer could no longer be used to set off the powder inside the piece. Belden had rushed out of the Priest's House and spiked the cannon "in defiance of the shot from every corner, and returned unhurt, until the moment of closing the door after him, when a shot through the door cut away part of his nose and one of his eyes." Inside the Priest's House, the Greys—having voted to fight rather than surrender—fortified their position as best they could. They used knives to loosen the earth underfoot and pile against the walls. They stacked chests and furniture against doors and windows, yet the Mexican artillery, only yards away, blew holes in these defenses. Their situation seemed hopeless as they were nearly out of powder themselves. The close-proximity artillery blasts were showering them with debris and spent ammunition.

Then, at three o'clock in the morning, the firing stopped.

To Cooke and the Greys inside the Priest's House, the silence must have been both welcome and foreboding. What they could not have known was that it was the result of what had become almost total disarray within the Mexican forces.

The Mexican commander had realized that with the arrival of daylight the Texans would begin reinforcing the defenders near the plaza and so he reluctantly ordered his senior officers to negotiate a surrender.

For nearly four hours inside the Priest's House, the Greys continued to use the respite from the fighting to reinforce their seemingly hopeless position. Then, to their complete surprise, they heard Mexican bugle calls outside their position sometime around seven o'clock that morning. Unsure what the buglers were signaling, the Greys maintained their position without responding until Lieutenant Colonel José Juan Sanchez Navarro ordered a white flag hoisted in the plaza.

Cautiously, Cooke emerged from the Priest's House and met the surrendering Mexican officers. Negotiations took place in which another Grey, Robert Morris, was instrumental in designing the final agreement that ended the fighting and surrendered Bexar and the Alamo to the Texans.

After considerable negotiating, the Mexicans were allowed six days to prepare for their withdrawal south of the Rio Grande. For their journey south, they were allowed a limited amount of arms and ammunition and one cannon to protect against Indian attacks. The rest of their supplies and equipment, including a considerable number of artillery pieces, were to remain behind as property of the Texans. Since the Texans had neither the resources nor the food to maintain a large number of prisoners, all captured soldiers were to be freed to join the retreat.

The New Orleans Greys had been badly bloodied in the battle for Bexar, but Texan casualty numbers were amazingly low given the ferocity and duration of the fighting.

As a unit, the Greys had led the decision to mount the assault and had then taken a lead in virtually every aspect of the five-day battle. William Cooke and his company of Greys were unquestionably responsible for the Mexican decision to surrender, with their daring and successful assault on the Priest's House at the very perimeter of the elite Mexican garrison in the plaza.

The battle for Bexar was recorded in history as a Texan victory over a Mexican army superior in numbers, ordnance, and supplies. In many ways, however, it was a validation of the New Orleans Greys as the most effective—and combat-experienced—military unit operating inside northern Mexico in the waning days of 1835.

In the aftermath of the Battle of Bexar, the Greys would divide, with some remaining in the captured Alamo and the others joining the doomed Matamoros Expedition and ending up at an old fort called La Bahía in Goliad. On March 6, 1836, the Greys in the Alamo would all die as General Antonio López de Santa Anna returned to San Antonio to reclaim the city and mission. On March 19, the remaining Greys would fight at the Battle of Coleto and be forced by Colonel James Fannin to surrender. One week later, they would be marched out of La Bahía and be the first of nearly 350 Texans to be massacred by firing squad at close range.

On Palm Sunday, March 27, 1836, the New Orleans Greys would cease to exist as a military unit. But their short, violent, 175-day unit legacy would be one of courage, ferocity, and bravery. And it was at the Battle of San Antonio de Bexar that they received their baptism of fire and greatest glory.

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Under what circumstances did David Crockett die at the Alamo Mission in San Antonio, Texas, on March 6, 1836?

The Case for David Crockett

By Thom Hatch • Illustrated by Gary Zaboly

For baby boomers, the enduring image of Crockett's demise was created in 1955 by Walt Disney's television show, in an episode titled "Davy Crockett at the Alamo," with Fess Parker starring in the title role. Those dramatic final scenes depicted Crockett swinging his flintlock rifle like a club to fend off an overwhelming number of Mexican soldiers. That heroic image was also advanced in the 1955 film *The Last Command* with Arthur Hunnicutt as Crockett and in 1960 by John Wayne's *The Alamo*.

But if you pick up a biography of Crockett or a book about the Alamo battle published after 1975, you likely will be informed that Crockett meekly surrendered to the Mexicans and was subsequently executed.

How did this latter portrayal become the commonly believed scenario in recent years? Had we been duped into our earlier belief that Crockett was a hero just so that Disney and the others could present an entertaining, patriotic show?

The answer to those questions may reflect the suspect methodology that many historians have employed in the process of evaluating the totality of facts surrounding certain events in the lives of those historical figures who have been elevated to legendary status.

To their credit, most historians continue to hold David Crockett in high regard in spite of the perceived flaw in his legend—and with good reason.

Prior to his journey to Texas in 1836, Crockett had been a farmer, hunter, businessman, veteran of the Creek Indian War, town commissioner, militia colonel, justice of the peace, Tennessee state legislator, and three-term United States congressman—an admirable résumé to be sure.

Crockett was a dead-eyed marksman and gained great respect for his prowess as a hunter—he once killed 105 bears in a single season. His accomplishments in the woods, where he was most comfortable, have been immortalized by having his name associated with the Boone and Crockett Club records for tro-

phy animals.

He was also a generous, friendly man who possessed a good sense of humor, did not use profanity, and, although lacking in formal education, expressed himself without depending entirely on backwoods lingo. His common manner endeared him to his constituents and to the public—he was much in demand on the Washington social circuit—but he refused to compromise his beliefs in the name of "politics," which eventually led to his downfall in that arena.

In the 1835 congressional election, Crockett championed land issues for the benefit of the common man—issues that opposed the ideology of Tennessee favorite son President Andrew Jackson. Crockett had promised his constituents during the campaign that if elected he would "serve them to the best of my ability; but if they did not, they could go to hell, and I would go to Texas." He lost by 252 votes.

Crockett arrived in San Antonio, Texas, on February 8, 1836, not necessarily anxious to fight for Texas independence against the Mexicans but as someone who desired to take advantage of land and business

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...Crockett entertained his companions with tall tales, and engaged in loud fiddle duels with fellow defender John MacGregor on bagpipes.

opportunities. Sam Houston, a friend of Crockett's from their time together in the nation's capital, had promised free land to anyone who would join the Texas Revolutionary Army and serve in the fight against General Antonio Lopéz de Santa Anna, the Mexican dictator who had vowed to put down the rebellion in the Mexican state of Texas.

Although aware of the impending dire circumstances, Crockett bravely volunteered to join the contingent of about 150 men who comprised the Alamo Mission garrison at that point in time, and declined any other status than that of a "high private, in common with my fellow-citizens."

Crockett also requested that Colonel William Travis, the Alamo commander, assign him to the most vulnerable position in the Alamo defense—the crumbling dirt and log filled gap between the chapel and the low barracks.

On February 23, Santa Anna and his army rode into San Antonio to root out these holed-up rebels, and the Texan defenders settled in for what would become a thirteen-day siege.

That first night, Crockett was afforded the opportunity to display his legendary marksmanship. A Mexican soldier had approached the river beyond the Alamo's west wall, and was brought down by a shot from Crockett's rifle—the first casualty sustained by either side.

On the third day of the siege, Santa Anna ordered a frontal assault that was repulsed by the volunteers. Crockett was singled out for praise in a letter written by Colonel Travis. "The Hon. David Crockett," Travis wrote, "was seen at all points animating the men to do their duty."

During the course of the siege, Crockett entertained his companions with tall tales, and engaged in loud fiddle duels with fellow defender John MacGregor on bagpipes.

As the siege wore on, he remarked to Susannah Dickinson, the only Anglo woman in the compound, that he would prefer to be killed out in the open rather than hemmed in behind the walls of the Alamo.

But he bravely stepped forward to cross the line Colonel Travis had scratched in the dirt with his sword on the night of March 5 to demonstrate his allegiance to the cause. When the Mexican army attacked the following morning, David Crockett was prepared to defend to the death his position at the south palisade.

The results of that attack are well documented. Every Texan defender, about 188, was killed. "Remember the Alamo!" became the battle cry that established the Republic of Texas two months later, when Sam Houston's ragtag army defeated and captured Santa Anna in the Battle of San Jacinto on April 21.

But, as has been the tradition of any notorious American defeat—Little Bighorn also comes to mind—stories and rumors based on questionable sources have reared their ugly heads to sully the names of heroes.

David Crockett's actions at the Alamo are no exception.

Was he a hero or coward? As we know, the answer to that question hinges on the manner in which Crockett died.

A handful of Mexican army eyewitnesses claimed that six or seven rebels were found by General Manuel Fernandez Castrillon hiding in the Alamo following the battle. These prisoners reportedly surrendered and were taken for disposition to Santa Anna. One of those prisoners was alleged to have been David Crockett.

The most controversial of these Mexican accounts can he found in a diary published by Texas A&M University Press in 1975 that was said to have been written in September 1836 by Lieutenant José Enrique de la Pena. This volume, *With Santa Anna in Texas: A Personal Narrative of the Revolution*, clearly contradicts the popular version of

Crockett's death.

De la Pena wrote:

> Some seven men had survived the general carnage and, under the protection of General Castrillon, they were brought before Santa Anna. Among them was one of great stature, well proportioned, with regular features, in whose face there was the imprint of adversity, but in whom one also noticed a degree of resignation and nobility that did him honor. He was the naturalist David Crockett, well known in North America for his unusual adventures, who had undertaken to explore the country and who, finding himself in Bejar [San Antonio] at the very moment of surprise, had taken refuge in the Alamo, fearing that his status as a foreigner might not be respected. Santa Anna answered Castrillon's intervention in Crockett's behalf with a gesture of indignation and, addressing himself to the sappers, the troops closest to him, ordered his execution. The commanders and officers were outraged at this action and did not support the order, hoping that once the fury of the moment had blown over these men would be spared; but several officers who were around the president and who, perhaps, had not been present during the moment of danger, became noteworthy by an infamous deed, surpassing the soldiers in cruelty. They thrust themselves forward, in order to flatter their commander, and with swords in hand, fell upon these unfortunate, defenseless men just as a tiger leaps upon his prey. Though tortured before they were killed, these unfortunates died without complaining and without humiliating themselves before their torturers. It was rumored that General Ramirez y Sesma was one of them; I will not bear witness to this, for though present, I turned away horrified in order not to witness such a barbarous scene.

It is true that almost immediately following the battle, rumors surfaced with reports of Crockett's surrender and execution, so the subject was vulnerable. That one lengthy paragraph in the de la Pena diary, however, was all that was necessary to change history in the minds of most historians.

Without any ambitious attempt to verify the contents of this alleged diary or test it against the rest of the evidence, scholars were quick to rewrite history around the premise that Crockett was not killed fighting to the end, but instead was a coward who had abandoned his post to hide from his enemy only to be found and executed.

There exists—and always has—no lack of relevant evidence that, at least in unbiased minds, questions the validity of the story contained in the de la Pena diary.

A total of seven Mexican soldiers claimed to have witnessed Crockett's execution. Several of them contradicted de la Pena's account by stating that Crockett and the other prisoners were not slashed to death with swords but instead were killed by musket fire.

It would stand to reason that a witness to such a barbarous, cold-blooded murder would recall whether the means of execution was done relatively silently by sword or with an earsplitting volley of musket fire. That fact alone would set off warning bells to the careful researcher.

Further, not one of those Mexican eyewitnesses, including de la Pena or Santa Anna, had ever before laid eyes on David Crockett and would not have been able to identify him from any other standard-issue Alamo defender. None of the Texas rebels, other than William Travis and Jim Bowie who had dispatched signed messages, were known by name to the Mexicans.

But for argument's sake, suppose six or seven Alamo defenders indeed had been captured. Would it have been out of the question to assume that some clever rebel might have identified himself as Crockett?

After all, a man with Crockett's credentials as a former U.S. congressman could argue for some sort of diplomatic immunity or courtesy if other stories failed to save him. Santa Anna was not particularly interested in going to war with the United States at that time. The execution of a dignitary—a celebrity of sorts—from this foreign country could have had serious implications.

That premise at first glance may seem far-fetched, but within the ranks of the Alamo defenders were people quite capable of such a scheme—including a number of lawyers and land speculators, as well as doctors, merchants, and other well-educated professionals.

A desperate impostor could conceivably have had the presence of mind and been glib enough to portray himself as the "naturalist" David Crockett in an attempt to gain his freedom.

This theory can be found in another impostor story, inspired by a letter dated February 6, 1840, written by a William C. White to the editor of a newspaper identified only as "the Gazette." White wrote that he had happened upon a man in a Salinas mine near Guadalajara who identified himself as David Crockett.

Congressman John Crockett, David's son, received the letter and requested that the U.S. secretary of state investigate. Nothing substantial was uncovered, and it was presumed that this claimant was merely seeking notoriety for his personal plight.

Numerous other stories of escape and capture, many quite absurd but likely believed by some, have appeared over the years to further confuse the issue. One dubious version of Crockett's death, related by a Mexican soldier, alleged that both Crockett and William Travis had fallen asleep in the midst of their dead comrades. Upon awaking from their slumber, they were captured by soldiers and shot to death by personal order of Santa Anna.

Of course, the notion that anyone could have even survived that battle and been taken prisoner would be highly questionable. After penetrating Alamo defenses, the Mexican soldiers combed every nook and cranny of the compound, brutally killing and often commit-

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ting unspeakable atrocities upon their victims. They stooped so low as to kill all the helpless sick and wounded in the hospital, and made an effort to harm the women and children who hid in the chapel until driven away by officers.

When every Alamo defender had been killed, these soldiers went berserk and engaged in a ghoulish frenzy. They stabbed and re-stabbed the corpses with their bayonets, fired musket balls into them, and stripped and mutilated the bodies. Some defenders, such as Jim Bowie who lay in bed armed with pistols provided him by Crockett, were lifted onto bayonets like hay on pitchforks and tossed around. The odds that anyone could hide or surrender in light of such behavior would be slight.

The list of Alamo eyewitnesses testifying on Crockett's behalf include two Americans; a Mexican civilian official; another Mexican soldier who participated in the battle; and a young *Tejano* (a native Mexican living in Texas) survivor from the Alamo. Each of these people later stated that they had observed Crockett's dead body.

Survivor Susannah Dickinson, wife of artillery Captain Almeron Dickinson, was the sole Anglo witness. She and her fifteen-month-old daughter, Angelina, had hidden in the chapel during the battle in the company of the Mexican women and children. At some point soon after the carnage, Susannah, who had been wounded in the leg by an errant musket ball, and the other noncombatants were marched through the maze of dead bodies that littered the compound on their way to being presented to Santa Anna. Mrs. Dickinson claimed that at that time she observed Crockett's body—quite dead—lying on the ground near his assigned defensive position between the chapel and the barracks building near the south palisade. She said, "I recognized Col. Crockett lying dead and mutilated between the church and the two story barrack building, and even remember seeing his peculiar cap by his side."

This woman would assuredly have been studying the face of each defender she passed in an effort to recognize her husband.

In the final moments of the battle, Captain Dickinson had dashed to the chapel. He was said to have cried, "Great God, Sue! The Mexicans are inside our walls! All is lost! If they spare you, save my child!" He had hugged his daughter and kissed his wife goodbye, and returned to the battle. Dickinson was killed beside his cannon in the rear of the chapel.

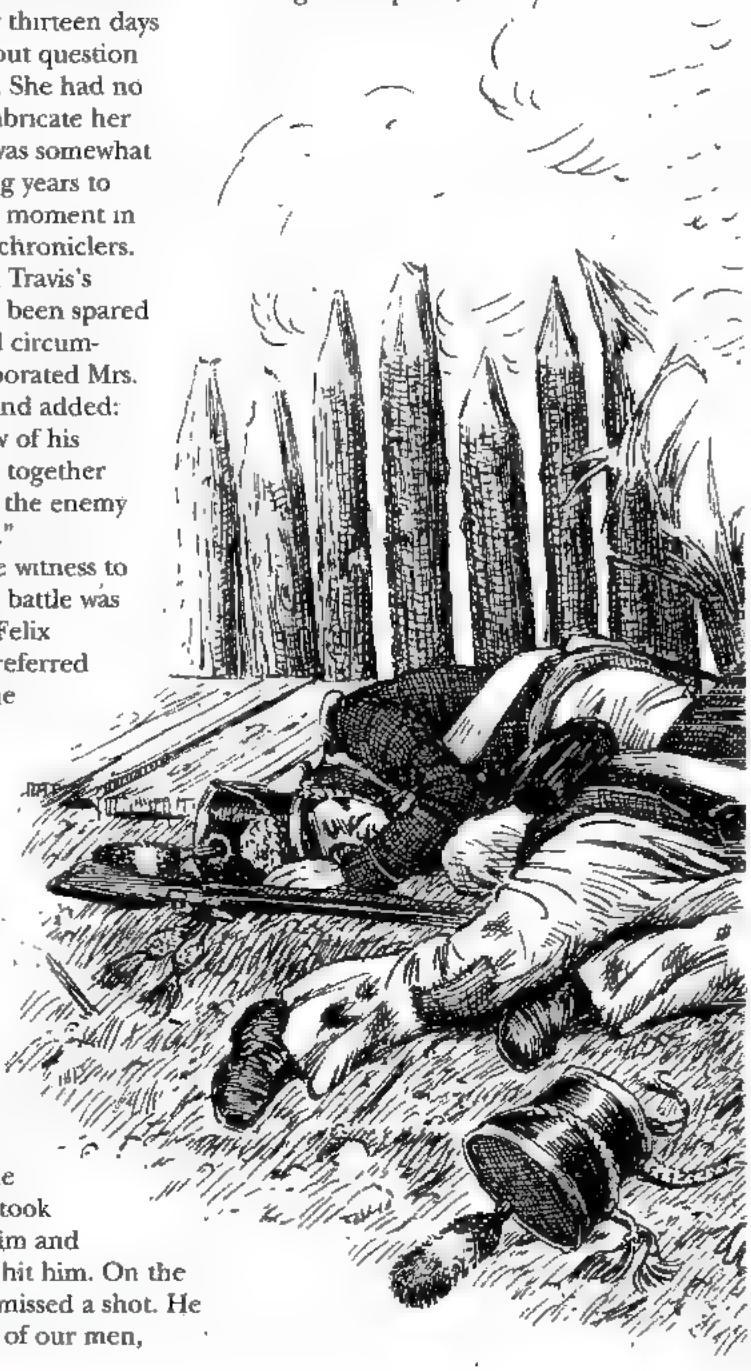
Susannah also later remarked about Crockett's talent as a fiddle player during their thirteen days together, and without question knew him on sight. She had no known motive to fabricate her story and, in fact, was somewhat reluctant in ensuing years to relive that horrible moment in time for inquiring chroniclers.

Colonel William Travis's slave, Joe, who had been spared due to his race and circumstance, later corroborated Mrs. Dickinson's story, and added: "Crockett and a few of his friends were found together with twenty-four of the enemy dead around them."

Another possible witness to Crockett's death in battle was Mexican Sergeant Felix Nunez, who likely referred to Crockett when he reported in 1889: "He was a tall American of rather dark complexion and had on a long buckskin coat and a round cap without a bill, made out of fox skin with the long tail hanging down the back. This man apparently had a charmed life. Of the many soldiers who took deliberate aim at him and fired, not one ever hit him. On the contrary, he never missed a shot. He killed at least eight of our men, besides wounding several others. This being observed by a lieutenant who had come in over the wall, he sprang at him and dealt him a deadly blow with his sword, just above the right eye, which felled him to the ground, and in an instant he was pierced by not less than twenty bayonets."

Admittedly, no one could say for certain that Crockett was the subject of Sergeant Nunez's testimony. Nonetheless, his account must be considered.

Twelve-year-old Enrique Esparza, son of Alamo defender Gregorio Esparza,



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had been hiding with the women and children not far from Crockett's position. He told his story to a newspaper in 1907, which included this account: "He [Crockett] fought hand to hand. He clubbed his rifle when they closed in on him and knocked them down with its stock until he was overwhelmed by numbers and slain. He fought to his last breath."

Quite a bit of time had passed when Esparza's story came to light. Older people, however—as oral historians have discovered—usually have the ability to detail events from childhood with uncanny accuracy.

The acting *alcalde* (mayor) of San Antonio, Francisco Antonio Ruiz, had been assigned the distasteful task of disposing of the Alamo dead—both Mexican and Texan—after the battle. Ruiz stated that Santa Anna asked him for a personal escort through the compound for the purpose of pointing out the bodies of William Travis, Jim Bowie, *and David Crockett.*

The testimony of Ruiz differed only slightly from that of Susannah Dickinson and Joe when he recalled finding Crockett's remains farther to the west, closer to the eighteen-pounder cannon.

Notable by its absence is any mention of the incident by General Antonio Lopéz de Santa

Anna.

Here was a man known to embellish his exploits, who certainly would have viewed the cowardice of another famous figure as an opportunity to elevate his own heroic status. Yet, Santa Anna's autobiography does not contain one word regarding the surrender and execution of Crockett, or anyone else at the Alamo.

The most damning piece of evidence to dispute the theory that Crockett surrendered may be found, interestingly enough, within Lieutenant José Enrique de la Pena's controversial memoir.

This 700-page work, *La Rebelion de Texas—Manuscrito Ineditode 1836 por un Oficial de Santa Anna* (*The Texas Revolution—Unpublished Manuscript of 1836 by one of Santa Anna's officers*), was self-published in 1955 by Jesus Sanchez Garza, a Mexico City antiques dealer.

The manuscript was subsequently purchased by John Peace, chairman of the University of Texas Board of Regents. Few scholars were aware of its contents until Carmen Perry, archivist and director of the Daughters of the Republic of Texas, translated the work and Texas A&M University Press published it in 1975.

As previously mentioned, apparently no one thought it necessary to authenticate or in any manner verify the validity of this diary in part or entirety, which is highly unusual given the revelation about Crockett. Rather than view this information with professional skepticism, historians embraced it as fact.

One man, however, Bill Groneman, an Alamo scholar who has written extensively about the subject, took up the challenge.

Groneman was afforded the opportunity to examine the original, handwritten de la Pena manuscript at the University of Texas at San Antonio.

Groneman discovered some suspicious discrepancies. Among other things, the document contained the handwriting of more than one person; it was written on at least fifteen makes, kinds, and sizes of paper; the manuscript contained factual errors; used phrases that were not common in 1836, such as the World War I term, "crimes against humanity," and included material from sources unknown at that point in time.

In addition, certain phrases in the de la Pena memoir bore striking resemblance to passages in a book called *The Journal of Jean Lafitte* by John Andrechyne Laflin, which was published by a vanity press in 1958. The Lafitte book was proven to be a fake.

Charles Hamilton, a handwriting expert who included Laflin's forged work as a chapter in one of his books, viewed photocopies of portions of de la Pena's diary and concluded that it was also likely written by John Laflin.

Sadly enough, many historians have viewed Groneman's admirable attempt at authenticating the manuscript with skepticism—apparently because Groneman, who has embraced Alamo history as a lifelong research project, does not carry the credentials of a college professor or full-time historian, but serves as an investigator for the New York City Fire Department.

This logic by historians in dismissing Groneman's research makes about as much sense as professional archeologists refusing to place any credibility in most major archeological finds just because they were discovered by "amateurs."

Could this be attributed to professional jealousy? Or, perhaps embarrassment that they had not been as attentive to the basic tenets of historical methodology as had Groneman?

One can only speculate.

Despite the book's questionable lineage, two anonymous "native Texans" paid $387,000, including commissions, at a Los Angeles auction in November 1998 for the privilege of owning the de la Pena diary.

Several troubling thoughts come to mind now that the manuscript has moved from the public arena to become a private investment. Who will now be permitted to examine the diary? Will the manuscript ever again be considered a useful research tool in helping to solve the mystery of Crockett's death?

Only time will tell.

But time has already told us enough about the Crockett controversy to make a determination. Clearly, sufficient evidence exists to cast more than a shadow of a doubt on the story contained in the de la Pena memoir—regardless of whether or not the work is authentic.

Suppose the diary is truthful as far as de la Pena believed, with information he either heard about or thought he had witnessed. It remains as just one piece of evidence, certainly not enough to cause the careful researcher to simply ignore the majority of the contradictory testimony.

Therefore, taking into consideration the entire body of evidence with a dose of common sense, the mystery of Crockett's death should solve itself in unbiased minds.

Until more definitive evidence to the contrary can be presented, there is reason to believe that David Crockett lived up to his legend. Known and trusted facts substantiate that conclusion.

He died a hero's death—fighting to the end beside his comrades somewhere near the Alamo's south palisade—just like Walt Disney portrayed him in that climactic final scene.

The Texas Revolution stands in history as a testament to the bravery of common people who could not resist the inherent urge to seek freedom from tyranny and were willing to sacrifice their lives for the privilege. The names of other engagements of this revolution may have become obscure footnotes in history, but as long as courage, honor, and determination are valued, we will always "Remember the Alamo!"

And so it is with the heroes who died for this cause of freedom in the Alamo. Many of the names have been forgotten or are subject to confusion due to an inadequate roster of participants.

But one hero can be identified: David Crockett.

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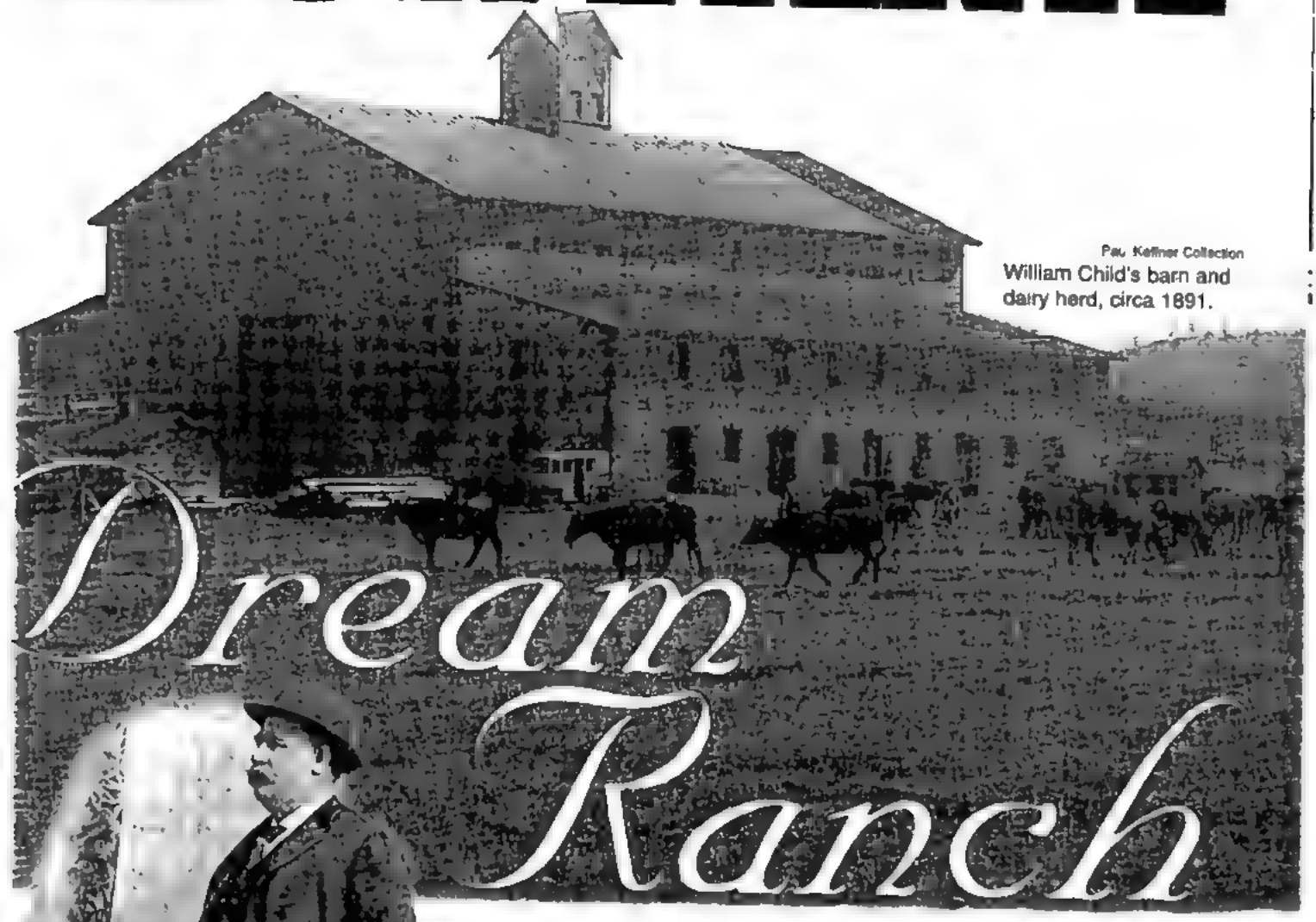


Paul Kellner Collection
William Child's barn and dairy herd, circa 1891.

Montana Historical Society, Helena
William Child, from a photograph taken at Taylor Studio, Helena, Montana.

By Bernice Karnop

James E. Stuart, who first saw Helena, Montana, in the summer of 1883, wrote, "It was then reputed the wealthiest city of its size in the world. Every newly made millionaire of the place seemed to be striving to outdo all others, of whom there were many."

Stuart could have been referring to William C. Child, whose modest fortune grew from his mining investments. Child sported a walrus mustache, wore fashionable clothes, and drove a high-stepping team of matched white horses. He and his wife lived in the best neighborhood, hobnobbed with the socially elite, and loved to dance. When President Chester A. Arthur visited

Montana Historical Society, Helena

A group of picnickers at W.C. Child's residence and dance hall, circa 1890. From a photograph taken by J.L. Ming, Helena photographer

Mammoth Hot Springs in September 1883, Child was one of three Helena men who went there to meet him.

As if this were not enough, as Child neared fifty years old, he dreamed of becoming a gentleman farmer. He purchased a ranch a few miles out of Helena and set up a model stock farm.

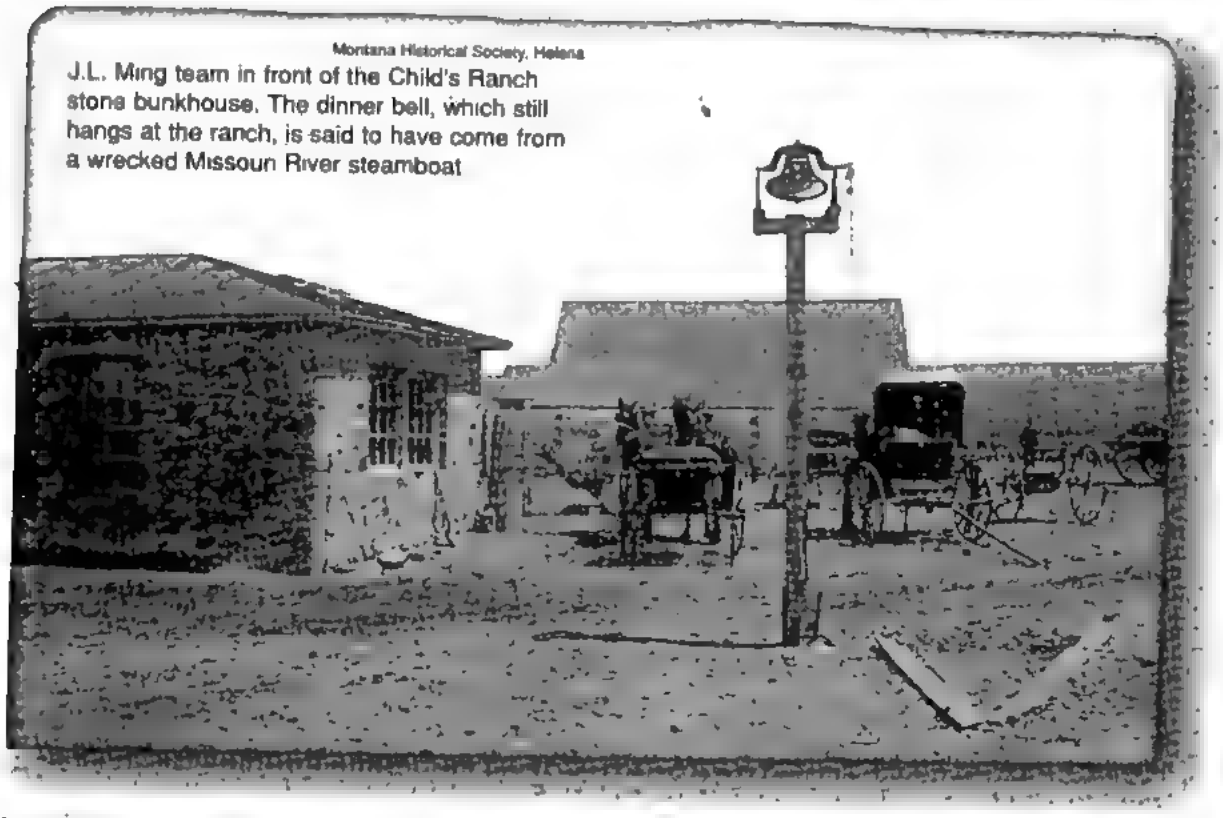
"Child," states the 1887 *Helena Board of Trade Report*, "believes that there is profit as well as satisfaction in doing things as well as possible." His success seemed certain, until the Silver Panic of 1893. This event plunged him into bankruptcy and into an emotional crisis even more difficult to master.

William Child grew up in Connecticut, the son of a Long Island steamship captain. He arrived in Montana's future capital in 1870, and was employed by Wells, Fargo & Company Express five years after the discovery of gold in Last Chance Gulch.

In 1871, Child is listed as a partner in the Helena Reduction Works, and on May 18, 1872, he was appointed register of the United States Land Office. He was treasurer for both the Peerless Jenny and

Montana Historical Society, Helena

Mrs. William Child, the former Mary McFarland, from a photograph taken at Taylor Studio, Helena, Montana.



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J.L. Ming team in front of the Child's Ranch stone bunkhouse. The dinner bell, which still hangs at the ranch, is said to have come from a wrecked Missoun River steamboat

Bannister mining companies

Child may have noticed the prime spot on Prickly Pear Creek when he worked in the land office. It had abundant water, broad hayfields, and was near town, from where Child planned to manage his landed estate. He bought the farm in 1885, from Biddle Reeves

The *Helena Herald* noted in November 1886, that as an experiment, an artisan well, four inches in diameter and 160 feet deep, was sunk on the W.C. Child property "It is probable," states the impressed writer, "that artisan wells will abound throughout the Prickly Pear Valley in the course of a few years "

Thousands of range cattle died in Montana during the hard winter of 1886-87, underscoring the folly of neglecting large herds on the open range. To prevent such a thing from happening to him, Child brought stone masons from Italy to build the largest and best stock barn in the Northwest.

Montana Historical Society, Helena

William Child, at bat, during a Child's Ranch Sunday school picnic, 1891

The barn, still standing, lived up to Child's dream. It measures 100 by 100 feet on its lower two levels and 50 by 100 feet on the top level. The timbers, which soar thirty feet above the top floor, were mortised and pinned, instead of being nailed, and the sheet steel roof was topped with a tall, four-gabled cupola.

The basement and wings of the barn were made of stones taken from the excavation for the foundation. During the digging, they discovered gold placer ground. "Mr. Child does not intend to sluice away his model stock farm to get the gold dust and nuggets it contains," noted the Board of Trade report, as the construction continued.

The main part of the three-story barn required 200,000 board feet of lumber. It included 310 stalls for cattle in the basement with 200 more stalls on the main floor. The main and upper floors had space for 350 tons of hay, and still there was room to spare. Some speculate that this New Englander planned to establish a woolen mill in part of the barn.

The basement and main floor have running water pumped in from a well 175 feet deep, sunk in a ravine a mile away. The water turned a grinding mill and powered a shaft that ran the length of the barn.

Child bought 70 registered Herefords and 150 high grade cattle. His dairy of 100 milk cows used a centrifugal process for extracting the cream. His wheat and barley took the first premium at the Centennial Exhibition and at the London World's Fair in 1887.

Both the new Montana Central and the Northern Pacific railroads crossed Child's farm, showcasing the white-faced cattle grazing peacefully near the track.

Besides the huge barn, Child built a stone bunkhouse containing a cook house and dining hall, a 300 by 200-foot L-shaped stone shed, with a lean-to roof to protect livestock from the prevailing winter winds, and another stone structure

Visiting the Child/Kleffner Ranch Today

In 1943, when Paul Kleffner first laid eyes on the Child ranch, he says, "It was a mess."

The house was stripped of everything, including the linoleum off the floors. The roof leaked, the plaster was falling off the walls, and there was a hole through the floor of the front room where someone had chopped wood. The last tenants had kept their chickens in the ballroom upstairs.

The barn had fared worse. All seventy windows were broken, and many of the frames had been stolen. The tin was off the roof, and it hadn't been painted since it was built. Manure was so deep on the ground floor that the bottoms of the timbers were rotting away.

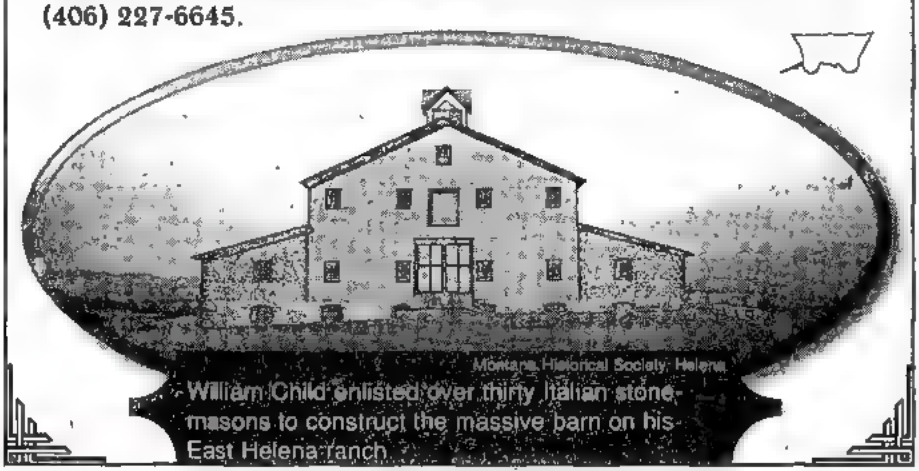
Even the beautiful setting, tucked close to the mountains on Prickly Pear Creek, had been ravaged. While a bank owned it during the Great Depression, they'd dredged the gulch for gold. Piles of tailings were laced with the twisted pipes from Child's elaborate water system.

Over the past fifty years, Paul and Thelma Kleffner not only worked the place, and raised seven children, they restored it to its former beauty. As time permitted, Kleffner sifted through files in the Montana Historical Society library unearthing the story of the successful and tragic life of William Child.

In 1995, Kleffner, who is now eighty-two years old, opened his ranch home to guided tours. A gifted storyteller and historian, he makes William Child's dream ranch live again.

To get to the ranch, drive three miles on U.S. Highway 12 from Helena to East Helena. On the edge of East Helena, turn south on State Highway 518 toward Montana City. The ranch is one mile from the turn. You'll notice the big red barn on your right, but go to the second cattle guard before turning in to the octagonal house.

Tours are scheduled June 1 through October 1 at 10 AM and 2 PM, Monday through Saturday, and at 2 PM on Sunday. The cost for the tour is $5.00. Large groups are welcome; call ahead for discounts. For more information, write Paul Kleffner, P.O. Box 427, East Helena, MT 59635; visit their web site at www.helenamt.com/kleffner; or call (406) 227-6645.



Montana Historical Society, Helena

William Child enlisted over thirty Italian stonemasons to construct the massive barn on his East Helena ranch.

that held a milk house, ice house, and root cellar downstairs, with living quarters above.

Finally, Child set the stone masons to work on an octagonal stone house unlike anything the folks in Helena had seen. He didn't intend to live in the house but use it to host parties. The entire second floor was a ballroom, with a polished maple floor wedging out from the central chimney.

The walls were made of field stone and the corners of red brick, custom-made to accommodate the forty-five-degree angles needed for a house with eight sides. A second-story window on each of the sides extends into a dormer in the metal-sheeted mansard roof. A raised bead of red mortar accented the joints in the masonry.

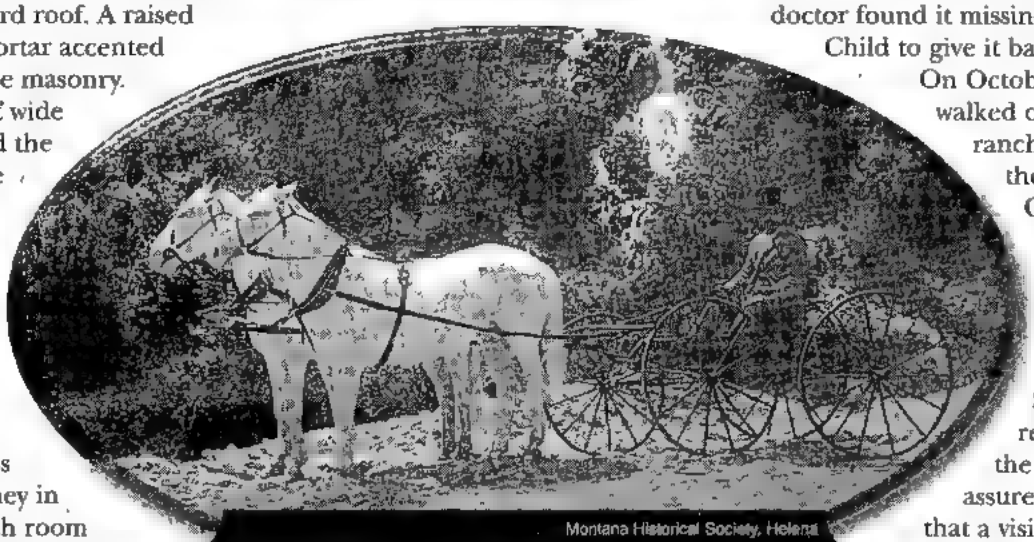
A seven-foot wide veranda circled the house, and five doors opened through the foot-thick walls. Four large rooms on the main floor roughly formed the shape of a cross with the chimney in the center. Each room had its own fireplace. Four smaller rooms filled the remaining angles. Interior walls bend as much as eighteen inches to intersect other walls and to keep from interfering with the doors and windows.

A special train brought guests from Helena to Child's siding; they walked a short distance to the house, and ate and danced till dawn, then rode the train back to Helena.

The parties glittered, but the silver market began to tarnish. Foreign governments dropped the silver standard as a base of their currencies. Although the U.S. government bought domestic silver, President Grover Cleveland blamed this silver purchase program for the depression that hit the country in the early 1890s. In mid-1893, he called a special session of Congress and repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act. Montana's silver industry shut down overnight. Child couldn't pay the debts on his elaborate buildings and expensive stock when his mining revenue dried up. He was forced to assign his dream ranch to Colonel Wilbur F. Sanders. Sanders immediately advertised it for sale.

The ad is revealing.

> I offer for sale for cash in hand that property known as "The Child Ranch," situated three miles south easterly from Helena, at the junction of the Prickly Pear and McClellan creeks above East Helena, consisting of about twenty-eight hundred acres of land, all under fence, traversed by two running streams, with living springs, ditches, and artisan well, bedrock drain, reservoirs, water power; crossed by two railroads; with houses, barns, sheds, outhouses; fences; dairy establishment—all of the finest and most complete quality; with cows, horses, cattle, swine, mules, agricultural implements; carpenter, blacksmith, plumbing and mining tools; wagons, harness, machinery, water pipe, grinding mills; also a herd of milk cows—about seventy head, also a herd of cattle consisting of about eighty head, and an interest in one herd of thoroughbred Hereford cattle on Sun river; also a herd of cattle in Madison county; and all personal property of every kind and description on said ranches.
>
> This is a rare chance to purchase a ranch and other property not excelled in Montana. W.F. Sanders, Assignee.



Montana Historical Society, Helena

William Child out for a buggy ride. Photograph taken by E.D. Keller, Helena, Montana, photographer.

Child's debts, Sanders would later say, amounted to about $30,000. "In ordinary times his assets would be fully $100,000 if not $150,000, or even $200,000."

Child couldn't eat or sleep. He swallowed an ounce of laudanum on September 26, but a doctor pumped his stomach and saved his life. He pilfered morphine, but the doctor found it missing and forced Child to give it back.

On October 13, Child walked out to the ranch, and spent the day. Mary Child asked the doctor to go out and check on her husband, but Sanders, returning from the ranch later, assured the doctor that a visit wasn't necessary.

Child ate supper at the ranch and spent the night.

In the morning, Mary returned to find Child unconscious, and the men trying to arouse him. By 10 AM, Child was dead. He was fifty-five. He died one month to the day after the ranch went on the block.

Penciled on a scrap of paper in Child's vest pocket, was the message, "I arrived at the ranch very much worn out and need rest. Something tells me that I shall never leave this place alive."

William Child had invested all of his fortune in the Prickly Pear ranch, reported the *Helena Herald*'s obituary, "which, but for the hard times, would have undoubtedly been the success he wished to make it."

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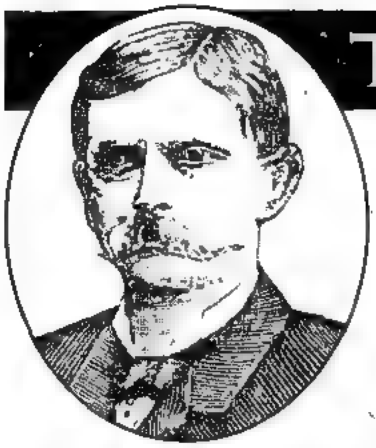


TRUE WEST LEGENDS:

CHARLES McKINNEY

By Chuck Parsons

February 14, 1858—Charles Brown McKinney is born to Charles B. and Susan (Shepherd) McKinney near Aberdeen, Mississippi, one of five children; his siblings were John T., William W., Corbet, and Eliza V. McKinney.

1864—Although the exact date of their move to Texas is uncertain, by 1864 the McKinney family is listed on the tax rolls of Washington County. During this period, the family has survived the horrors of war and lost their land holdings in Mississippi, but will survive Reconstruction. Being on a farm-ranch in central Texas at this time suggests the boys will become farmers.

February 1, 1876—Seventeen-year-old Charlie and brother W.W. join Company A, Washington County Volunteer Militia, commanded by Leander H. McNelly. Charlie and William furnish their own horses and are issued a Sharps rifle and pistols. As privates in McNelly's company of state troops they will be paid $13 monthly salary, $12 clothing allowance, and fifty cents a day horse allowance. The state furnishes many "targets" in the form of thieves, killers, and renegades.

May 18, 1876—Six miles above Edinburg at the Sabinito Rancho, McNelly and his men catch up with a group of raiders. They cross the Rio Grande, kill one oulaw, and recover stolen livestock. A Mexican official wants to know why McNelly sends armed men into Mexico. McNelly responds that he didn't send them in, that he led them. This quality of McNelly earns the love and respect of his men.

June 3, 1876—McNelly and a detachment probably including the McKinney brothers enter into the Pendencia Country, generally known as King Fisher's Territory. Instead of resisting arrest, King Fisher and nine of his men surrender. At least seven of the gang could be convicted of murder, claimed McNelly. About seven hundred head of stolen cattle and horses are recovered. Within hours of delivering the prisoners to jail, they are released for lack of witnesses to testify against them.

June 14, 1876—John and Pink Smith, alias Burns, are captured on the Siestedero Creek in Frio County. John had been jailed for murder in Waco and was liberated by brother Pink four years before. Charlie McKinney and fellow Ranger Thomas J. Evans deliver the Smith brothers back to Waco. While there the two rangers assist McLennan County lawmen in arresting one Cavanaugh, wanted on an attempted murder charge in Bosque County.

January 1877—McKinney and Ranger W.T. Davis are in the Hill Country scouting for fugitives. McNelly, given an honorable discharge for health reasons, is replaced by Lieutenant Jesse Lee Hall. In the reorganization of the company, both McKinney brothers are maintained, showing Hall's confidence in their manhunting abilities. A combined group of Hall's company and that of Frontier Battalion Neal Coldwell's surround the town of Eagle Pass and capture several fugitives from justice.

August 14, 1877—C.B. McKinney and three others arrest two men for murder, their identity not given in the records, at Fort Clark.

February 24, 1878—W.W. McKinney resigns from the Ranger force due to health reasons. He returns to Washington County where he lives out his life as a farmer. He never marries. No record has been found of his death or final resting place.

February 1878—The Fulton Store in Aransas County is robbed. C.B. McKinney, A.S. McKay, and W.L. Rudd work the case. Within a brief time Frank Hartman, Gordon Franks, Coleman Franks, Charles Ernst, and Charles Wittinburt are captured and charged with the robbery.

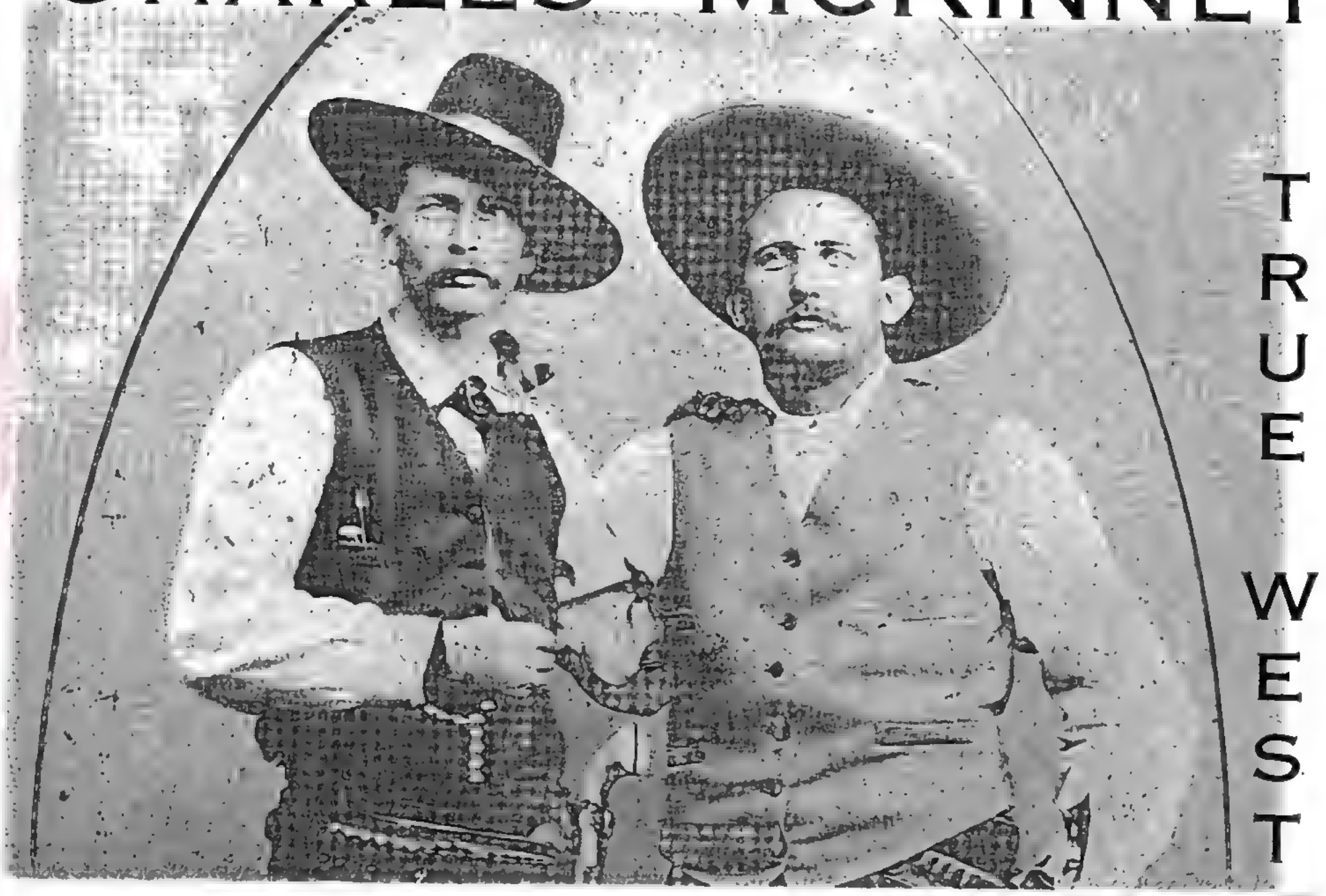
November 1878—Due to lack of funds, Hall's Company is reduced in numbers. Twelve Rangers are discharged, eighteen remain. Captain Hall elects to keep C.B. McKinney on his force.

February 26, 1880—McKinney and William O. Tompkins lure suspected cattle thief Manuel Martinez into a trap near Fort Ewell; he resists and shots are fired. McKinney is credited with killing Martinez in self-defense. This is perhaps the first man McKinney kills.

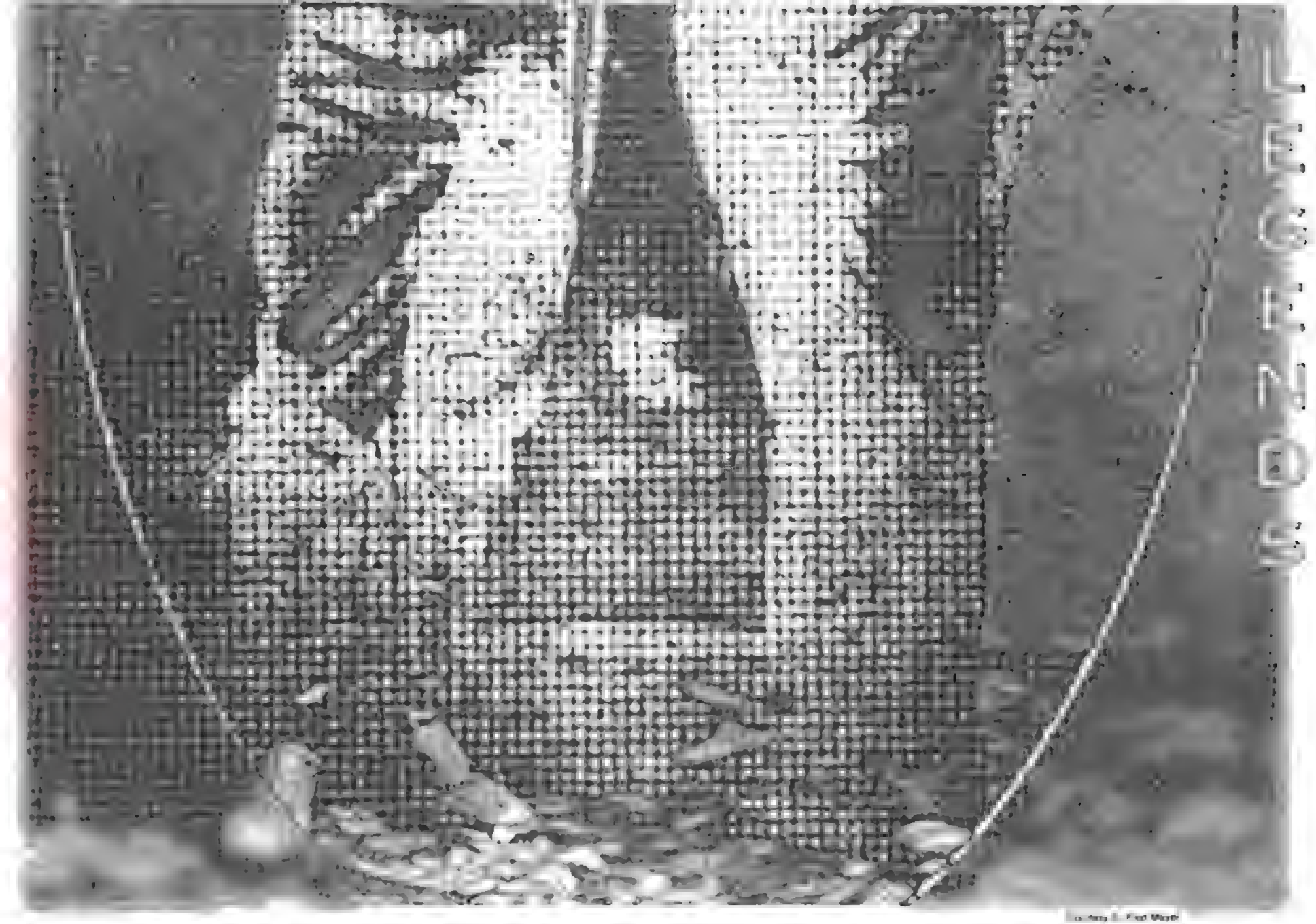
March 29, 1880—Peter Johnston reports a horse theft to McKinney. McKinney and Johnston go in pursuit and on Sauz Creek attempt to arrest suspect Marcus Labato. He resists and in the ensuing gunfire Johnston is wounded and McKinney kills Labato.

November 2, 1880—La Salle County's first election for county officers takes place. Tompkins and James M. Buck run for the office of sheriff and Buck wins, receiv-

CHARLES MCKINNEY



TRUE WEST



Ranger Charles Brown McKinney, the taller figure at left, and a companion believed to be George W. Farrow, circa 1882-83

ing twenty-five votes. Buck finds the job intolerable and soon resigns, explaining that the sheriff's office in La Salle County requires "a man who has no scruples in killing a man whether the law justifies him or not."

May 2, 1881—James Eli McCoy is arrested for theft and confined in the Webb County jail in Laredo. His hatred of McKinney will lead to tragedy.

June 1, 1881—McKinney is promoted to the rank of first sergeant. Sheriff Buck resigns and William O. Tompkins, a friend of James Eli McCoy, is named to replace him on June 13. During this time the Richard "Texas" McCoy-James Pierce Wright feud moves into La Salle County, after its commencement in Gonzales County. Wright is considered the leader of a gang of cattle thieves. Texas McCoy, deputy sheriff of Guadalupe County, forms a regulator group to recover stolen stock and destroy the gang.

June 16, 1881—McCoy and others are ambushed; J.P. Wright is identified as the trigger man. The pursuit and arrest of members of the "Wright Party" will continue for months. A traitor in the gang reveals the names of the ambushers. From October 10-15, McKinney arrests most of the men, including, J.P. Wright, his brother, Michael Wright, Jeff Davis Wade, Jasper and John Lyons, Will Jacobs, and George Woods. John R. House and Anderson Newman are arrested by Ranger W.L. Rudd. Court trials begin that continue for several years.

November 7, 1881—McKinney has been campaigning against Tompkins for the next term of sheriff. McKinney loses by only three votes.

February 18, 1882—McKinney marries Paulina Hay in Carrizo Springs, Dimmit County. They establish a home in Cotulla, county seat of La Salle, and start a family.

December 1, 1882—Having lost the sheriff's race, which he contests, McKinney is now appointed lieutenant of Company F, Texas Rangers, upon Lieutenant T.L. Oglesby's resignation.

February 3, 1883—In a special election McKinney is elected the third sheriff of La Salle County. Tompkins will not forget this action of McKinney "taking away" his office. Tompkins and James Eli McCoy develop a closer friendship.

March 1, 1883—To devote full time to his duties as sheriff, McKinney resigns his position with the Texas Rangers. He takes "peaceable possession" of the sheriff's office on February 26. He is twenty-six years old.

May 9, 1884—Sheriff McKinney and two others set a trap for suspected horse thieves in the brush. The horses are recovered and two men resist orders to surrender. One Sanchez is killed, and the other later dies of his wounds. James Eli McCoy is involved, intending McKinney would be killed in the gunfight.

March 7, 1885—G.M. Hodges, depot master at Encinal, is murdered and robbed. Witnesses provide evidence that ultimately results in the arrest and conviction of Jose Maria Mendiola. He is sentenced to death by hanging. The execution takes place on January 15, 1886. McKinney officiates; it is La Salle County's first legal execution.

December 26, 1886—Mrs. William Galloway comes to Cotulla and swears out a warrant charging Lorenzo Dow White with the rape of her eleven-year-old daughter, Mary. Sheriff McKinney and Deputy S.V. "Pete" Edwards travel to Twohig to arrest the accused. The two lawmen leave the train station and enter the brush with a guide. A few hundred yards from the depot is the shack of James Eli McCoy. He is with a friend, George "Bud" Crenshaw. Some meaningless conversation takes place about the Christmas holidays. When McKinney relaxes his guard for a moment, McCoy and Crenshaw shoot. McKinney is instantly killed by Crenshaw while Edwards is seriously wounded. His horse bolts and gallops off with Edwards hanging on. It is later suspected that William O. Tompkins was also in the shack and took a hand in the assassination.

January 18, 1887—Rangers attempt to arrest Crenshaw, in company with Tompkins. Crenshaw is shot and killed while resisting arrest. J. Walter Durbin receives credit for the kill. Tompkins is never charged with complicity in the murder. Partner James Eli McCoy finally surrenders, thinking he can only be charged with attempted assassination of Edwards.

June 27, 1887—McCoy is found guilty of conspiring to kill McKinney and is sentenced to hang. The execution takes place in San Antonio on August 23, 1889.

WHAT TO READ:

Captain C.B. McKinney—The Law in South Texas, by Chuck Parsons and Gary P. Fitterer. Henington Publ Co., 1993.
Captain Lee Hall of Texas, by Dora Neill Raymond. University of Oklahoma Press, 1940; reprint, 1982.
Walter Durbin, Texas Ranger and Sheriff, by Robert W. Stephens. Clarendon Press, 1970.
A History of La Salle County, South Texas Brush Country, 1856-1975, by Annette Ludeman. Nortex Press, 1976.

WHERE TO GO:

Cotulla, La Salle County, Texas. Easily found in the Cotulla Cemetery is the tall monument marking the grave of Sheriff McKinney. Also visit the Brush Country Museum, which has photographs and other mementos of the early days, including a "McKinney Room" and photographs of Lyndon Baines Johnson, who taught school in Cotulla.
La Salle County Courthouse. Request to visit the top floor, where portions of the cells that were used by Sheriff McKinney are on display.
Waco, Texas. Visit the Texas Ranger Hall of Fame, which features McKinney's pistol and other personal effects.

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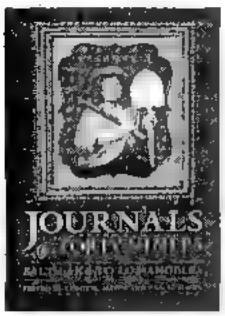
BOOKMART

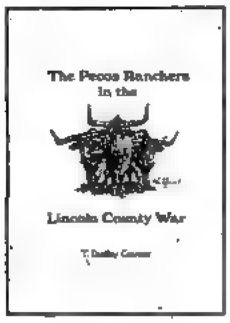
710—THEY DIED WITH CUSTER: SOLDIERS' BONES FROM THE BATTLE OF THE LITTLE BIGHORN. *By Douglas D. Scott, P Willey & Melissa A. Connor* The authors use historic sources, archeological evidence, and physical data to present new revelations about the men who rode and died with George Custer at the Little Bighorn. Through painstaking analyses of skeletal remains, the authors construct composite biographies of the soldiers, identifying ages, heights, states of health and mode of death A vast selection of illustrations, including photos, maps, drawings, and graphs, enhance the discussion. 419p. University of Oklahoma Press.

Cloth, $29.95



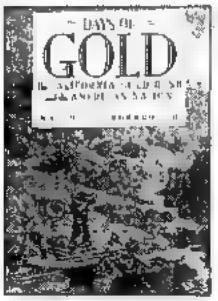
727—JOURNALS OF FORTY-NINERS: SALT LAKE TO LOS ANGELES. *Edited by LeRoy R Hafen & Ann W Hafen.* The Hafens have assembled a fascinating array of diaries and memoirs of forty-niners who set out from Salt Lake City toward California's goldfields over the Old Spanish Trail For many would-be gold miners, this dry, dangerous trail was preferable to crossing the Sierra Nevada, In reality, the choice of the southern route did not ease travelers' efforts, The narratives herein provide fine descriptions of these challenges. " . a prized addition to our knowledge. ."—*American Historical Review* 336p. University of Nebraska Press.

NEW SELECTION **Paper, $15.00**



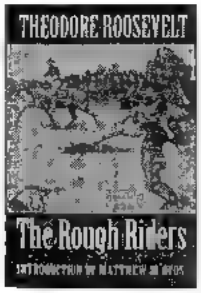
706—THE PECOS RANCHERS IN THE LINCOLN COUNTY WAR. *By T Dudley Cramer* Focusing on the Beckwith family, Cramer shares the story of the small ranchers from the Pecos Valley who played a prominent, often misinterpreted role in the Lincoln County War in New Mexico Territory. With rare exception these largely hard-working cattlemen and cowboys sided with the Murphy-Dolan-Riley partisans; believing strongly that the opposing forces of Tunstall-McSween and John Chisum were trying to oust them from the Pecos country. Cramer offers many rare, previously unpublished photos in this important history. 215p, Branding Iron Press.

AUTOGRAPHED! **Paper, $22.95**



648—DAYS OF GOLD: THE CALIFORNIA GOLD RUSH AND THE AMERICAN NATION. *By Malcolm J Rohrbough.* Described by the author as an "introduction" to the stampede for gold in California, this book provides far more than the usual historical 'introduction. Exhaustively researched and engagingly written, Rohrbough's *Days of Gold* explores the whys, whats, wherefores, and wherefores of one of the most consequential sagas in American history and in the development of the American nation. "Rohrbough tell the story straight from the mouths (or pens) of those who lived it."—*Christian Science Monitor* 373p. University of California Press.

Paper, $16.95

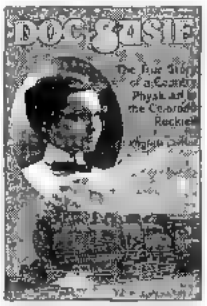


730—THE ROUGH RIDERS. *By Theodore Roosevelt introduction by Matthew M Ovos The Rough Riders*, published the year after the Spanish-American War—or in Roosevelt's words, "the splendid little war"—is Roosevelt's account of the mustering of the regiment, many of the troopers of which came from the American West, the perils endured, and the horseback charge up Kettle Hill during the battle for San Juan Heights. This reprint gathers eleven important photographs from earlier editions of the work and also contains two new maps and an index 320p. University of Nebraska Press.

Paper, $12.95

532—SOILED DOVES: PROSTITUTION IN THE EARLY WEST. *By Anne Seagraves. Soiled Doves* tells of the grey world of prostitution and the women who participated in the oldest profession. Colorful, if not socially acceptable, these women of easy virtue were a definite part of the early West, Illustrated with many rare photos, this book provides a touching insight into the lives of the ladies of the night. 173p. Wesanne Publications.

Paper, $11.95



588—DOC SUSIE: THE TRUE STORY OF A COUNTRY PHYSICIAN IN THE COLORADO ROCKIES. *By Virginia Cornell* Cornell offers the true story of Dr. Susan Anderson who arrived in frigid Fraser, Colorado, in 1907 a dying woman, but who recovered her health and then known as Doc Susie, ventured forth on snowshoes, horseback, and train to save the lives of the inhabitants of the Rockies. So desperate were they for medical attention they didn't care that she was a mere woman 237p Manifest Publications.

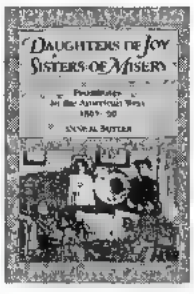
Paper, $14.95

701—STORM AND STAMPEDE ON THE CHISHOLM. *By Hubert E Collins* First published in 1928, Collins' autobiography chronicles the young ranch hand's life at the Red Fork Ranch on the banks of the Cimarron River in Indian Territory in the early 1880s Learning much from rangy cowboys in residence and frontier characters passing through, Hubert enjoyed more adventure than he would ever know again. "Indeed irresistible"—*New York Times.* 332p. University of Nebraska Press.

NEW SELECTION **Paper, $14.95**

728—STAGECOACH WEST. *By Ralph Moody* First published in 1967, *Stagecoach West* is a comprehensive history of stagecoaching west of the Missouri. Starting with the evolution of overland passenger transportation, Moody moves on to paint a lively and informative picture of western stagecoaching. from its early short runs through its rise with the gold rush, its zenith by 1868, and beyond. Moody uses contemporary accounts, illustrations, maps, and photographs to flesh out his narrative 359p University of Nebraska Press

NEW SELECTION **Paper, $15.00**



001—DAUGHTERS OF JOY, SISTERS OF MISERY PROSTITUTION IN THE AMERICAN WEST, 1865-90. *By Anne M Butler* "Frail sisters," "fallen angels," "soiled doves"—whatever they were called, these women lived lives of nearly anonymous destitution Butler's account of their lives bears scant resemblance to popular depictions in film and fiction, It reveals instead an existence on the brink of despair. 179p. University of Illinois Press

Paper, $12.95

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516—TREASURE OF THE SANGRE DE CRISTOS: TALES AND TRADITIONS OF THE SPANISH SOUTHWEST. *By Arthur L. Campa, foreword by J. Manuel Espinosa.* This collection includes stories of silver locked away in outlaw hoards, lost mines stacked with bars of gold, and fabulous Jesuit treasures buried when that order was expelled from New Spain. Not all of these folk treasures are of mineral wealth, however. There are also the legends of the Hermit of Las Vegas and of the lovelorn nun. 223p. University of Oklahoma Press.

Paper, $13.95

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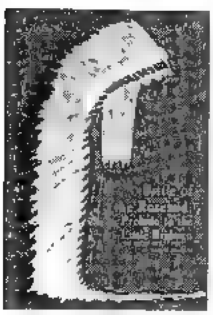

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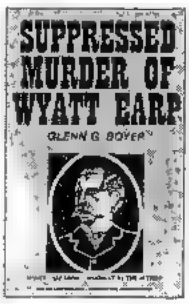

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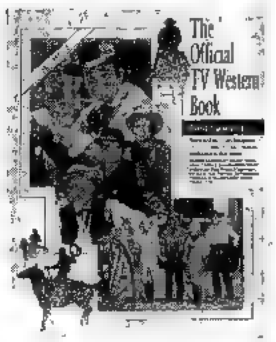

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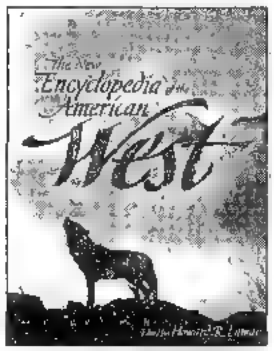

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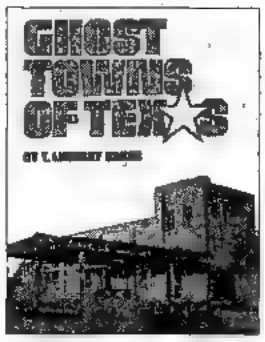

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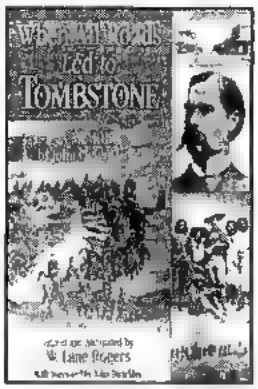

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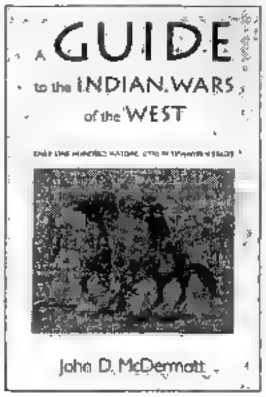

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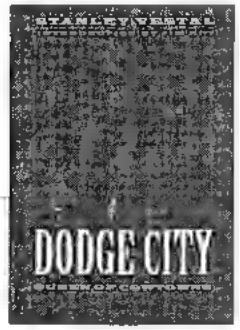

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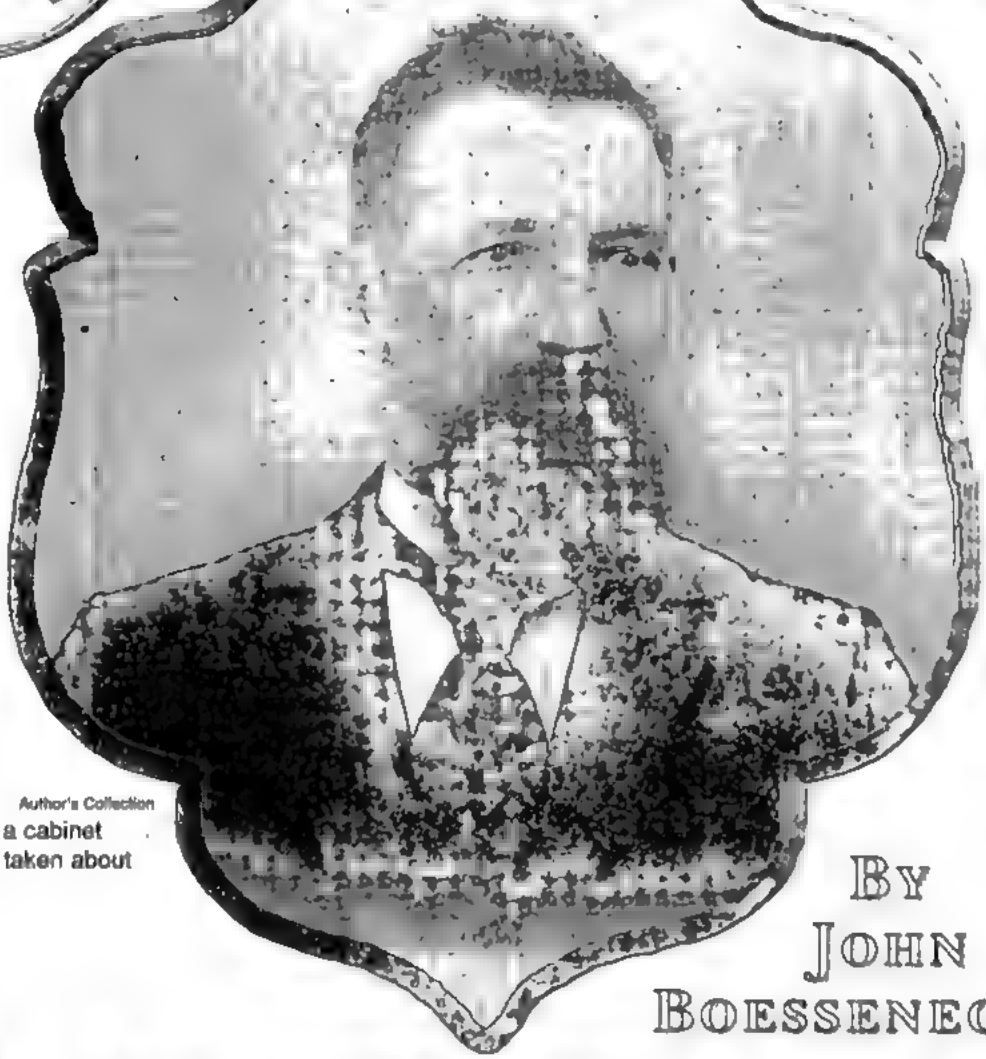
Ben Thorn: Gold Rush Lawman



Author's Collection

Ben Thorn, from a cabinet card photograph taken about 1880.

By John Boessenecker

Adapted from *Gold Dust and Gunsmoke: Tales of Gold Rush Outlaws, Gunfighters, Lawmen, and Vigilantes* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1999)

When one thinks of lawmen of the Old West, such figures as Wyatt Earp, Bat Masterson, Wild Bill Hickok, and Pat Garrett come to mind. Each of them established their reputations as peace officers long after the California Gold Rush and belong to the post-Civil War West of 1865-1900, a period which in the popular imagination came to be known as the "Wild West." It is that historic West which saw the Earp brothers and Doc Holliday shoot it out with the Clanton band in the streets of Tombstone near the O.K. Corral, as well as Pat Garrett's killing of Billy the Kid and the Texas Rangers' gunfight with Sam Bass's gang.

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But in reality, the popular images of the western lawman facing down lynch mobs, shooting it out with multiple opponents on Main Street, and pursuing outlaws on horseback all had their genesis in the California Gold Rush. The Gold Rush not only produced America's most violent frontier, it also produced some of the frontier's finest lawmen, among them Dan Gay, the gunfighting Sacramento police officer and Wells, Fargo detective; Billy Getman, the fast-shooting city marshal of Los Angeles; Bob Paul, later sheriff and United States marshal in Arizona Territory; and Isaiah W. Lees, captain of detectives of the San Francisco police and a giant in the history of American law enforcement. But few western peace officers could match the skill, daring, and longevity of Ben Thorn, the iron-willed lawman of Calaveras County.

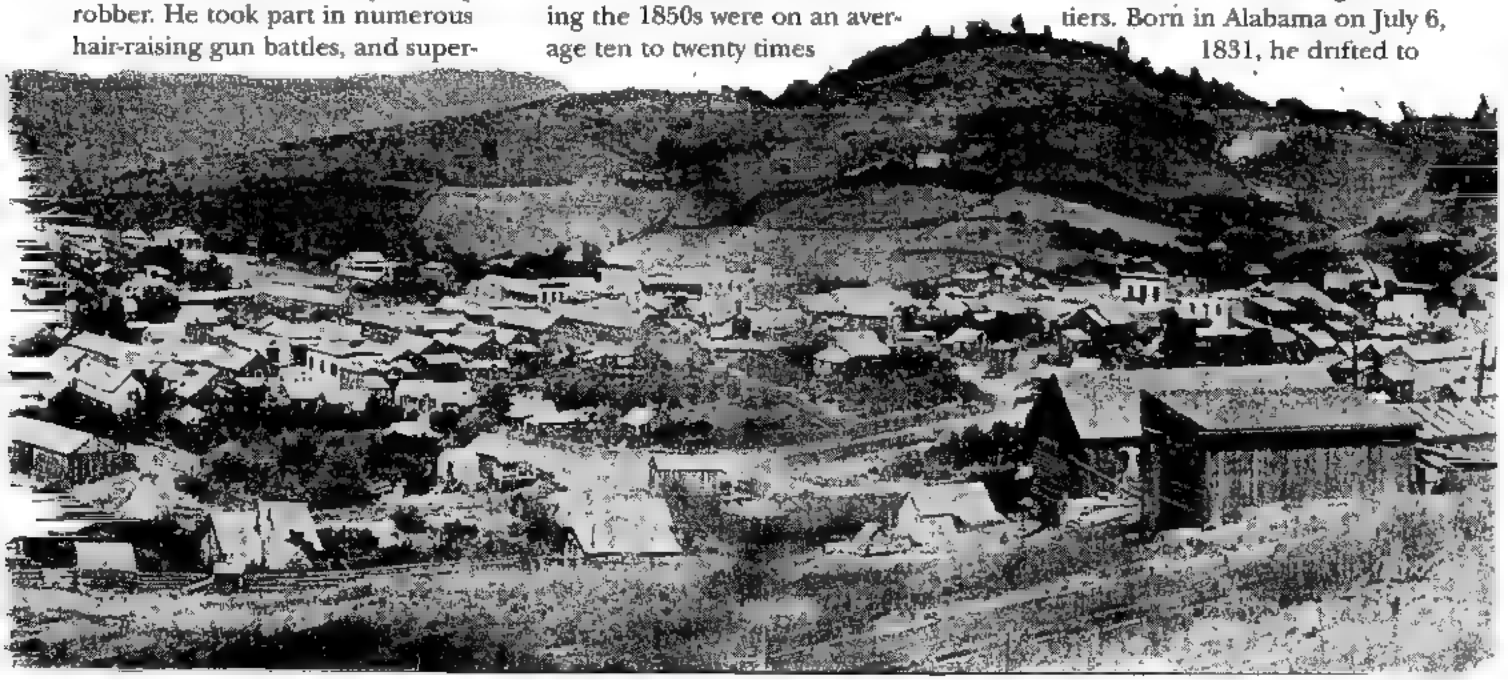
Ben Thorn served continuously as a law officer in Calaveras County from 1855 until his retirement almost half a century later, in 1903. During his long career he captured scores of dangerous outlaws, including the mankiller "Longhair Sam" Brown, and in 1883 played a prominent role in the manhunt for Charles E. Boles, alias Black Bart, America's most prolific stagecoach robber. He took part in numerous hair-raising gun battles, and superstitious Mexicans and Indians came to believe that he led a charmed life and that no knife or bullet could kill him.

Benjamin Kent Thorn was born in Plattsburg, New York, on December 22, 1829. When he was four, his parents moved to Illinois, then a rugged frontier, where Ben grew to manhood. At sixteen he began teaching school, and in 1849 he joined the Gold Rush to California. He began mining on the Yuba River in the Northern Mines, but by 1850 he drifted south to the diggings in Calaveras County, where he would spend the rest of his life.

During the Gold Rush, California was more than 90 percent male. Gold seekers rushed in from the four corners of the earth. Never before had so many armed civilians of such varied racial and religious backgrounds been thrown together. Thousands of young men were away from home for the first time in their lives. Unrestrained by the settling influences of home, family, women, and church, they became reckless in their newfound freedom, and fortified with alcohol, revolvers, and Bowie knives, lawless in their anonymity. Competition for mining claims and women led to extraordinary levels of violence. Rates of homicide in California during the 1850s were on an average ten to twenty times higher than those of 1990s America.

Ben Thorn's first law enforcement experience began in the spring of 1853, when, like hundreds of other miners in Calaveras County, he helped search for the rampaging gang of bandidos led by Joaquin Murrieta. Joaquin's band robbed and murdered many miners and was eventually chased out of the mining region by volunteer posses. Murrieta was finally slain by Captain Harry Love's California Rangers in July 1853. Ben Thorn soon became noted for reckless bravado, and on April 15, 1855, Charles A. Clarke, sheriff of Calaveras County, appointed him a deputy. The energetic young officer immediately set out to hunt down fugitives who had previously committed murders in his bailiwick. He would capture at least seven, one of whom was hanged at Mokelumne Hill, then the county seat.

It was not long before young Deputy Thorn tackled one of the worst bands of toughs in the gold region. Their leader was Longhair Sam Brown, the epitome of the Texas border ruffian. Coarse, loud, and boastful, weighing two hundred pounds, his long red hair flowing to his shoulders, Sam Brown cut a wide swath on two mining frontiers. Born in Alabama on July 6, 1831, he drifted to



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Mokelumne Hill, county seat of Calaveras County from 1852-1866, as it looked during the early 1860s.

Thorn dismounted and began walking slowly through the clearing toward the cabin....By now, six cocked guns were trained on the young deputy, but he kept advancing, a cigar clenched in his teeth and his gun hand well away from his holstered pistol.

Texas where he reportedly killed a man before joining the Gold Rush. Sam Brown appeared at Agua Fria in Mariposa County in March 1850, where he announced that he'd "rather play keerds than run a rocker."

One night several months later he killed his first man in the mining camp. Longhair Sam and a Texan named Hall were playing cards in the camp's sole fandango house. When angry words were exchanged between them, Hall drew his pistol and laid it on the table, while Brown rested his six-shooter on his lap. The game continued, but when the argument began again the two went for the guns and Longhair Sam shot Hall in the head, mortally wounding him. The affair was considered mutual combat and Brown was not arrested.

In 1853, he reportedly shot and killed a man named Lyons in Mariposa "without just cause or even serious provocation." In April 1854, at the nearby mining camp of Carson, he quarreled with a gambler named "One-Eyed" Gray over a game of cards. Longhair Sam struck Gray with his six-shooter and then shot him in the forehead, a fatal wound. In reporting this incident the editor of the Mariposa *Chronicle* offered a tongue-in-cheek apology: "We are sorry to inform our readers that we have only one murder case to present this week."

Sam Brown fled Mariposa and soon turned up in Calaveras County at the head of a band of gamblers and hardcases. On July 8, 1855, while running a monte game in Upper Calaveritas, Longhair Sam and a comrade, Hugh "Bunty" Owens, got into a row with several Chilean gamblers. Swinging their Bowie knives, Brown and Owens slashed two Chileans to death and wounded a third. They fled the camp, followed by the Chileans' friends. Opening fire on their pursuers, they killed another Chilean, which terminated the pursuit. A bystander raced to Ben Thorn's mining claim at San Antonio camp and reported the killings. Thorn, after obtaining warrants for the arrest of Brown and Owens, started after the killers with a fellow miner, Ed Hopkins. They rode all night in search and by daybreak learned that the badmen were holed up with four other members of the gang in a cabin on O'Neill Creek.

As they approached the cabin on horseback, Sam Brown appeared in the doorway, rifle in hand, and took careful aim. The cabin was set back from the road some distance, and the space between had been cleared of trees. Thorn dismounted and began walking slowly through the clearing toward the cabin. Hopkins, favoring discretion over valor, remained on the road. By now, six cocked guns were trained on the young deputy, but he kept advancing, a cigar clenched in his teeth and his gun hand well away from his holstered pistol. Thorn could see the muzzles of six-shooters and rifles protruding from the windows and between the logs. When Thorn had walked half the distance, Longhair Sam lowered his rifle, and Ben breathed a huge sigh of relief. He stepped up to the door and called on Brown and Owens to surrender. They came outside and after a brief parley submitted to arrest.

Many years later, a newspaper reporter asked Thorn whether he had been afraid.

"Afraid!" the sheriff exclaimed, with an emphatic nod of his head. "You bet I was afraid. That two hundred yards from the road to the cabin seemed like ten miles."

"Then what did you do it for?" the reporter asked.

"Oh, I knew what sort of man Brown was, and I knew that if we rode up to the cabin there would be a fight, and we would be at a disadvantage. But I didn't think he'd shoot me and he said he knew I would be square about it and that he wouldn't get a better chance to surrender after that. He said he figured it out that I was trusting him to be as square as I meant to be myself and he didn't like to be any less than I was thinking him to be. His men wanted to shoot, but he ordered them not to as long as I didn't make any move toward my gun."

Before Thorn started back with his two prisoners, Longhair Sam asked that he be allowed to pack his rifle with him for self protection. The deputy, realizing that they might be attacked by Chileans along the way, granted him this favor. Thorn and Hopkins took the pair to a sawmill on San Antonio Creek owned by Orrin Spencer, the justice of the peace. Their preliminary hearing was one of the most exciting that ever occurred in the county. A crowd of angry Chileans, one hundred strong, gathered at the mill. Forty of Longhair Sam's friends were also present. Ill feelings were at a fever pitch between the two factions, and Ben Thorn had his hands full trying to prevent a bloody battle.

The hearing was held in a saloon near the sawmill and lasted for two

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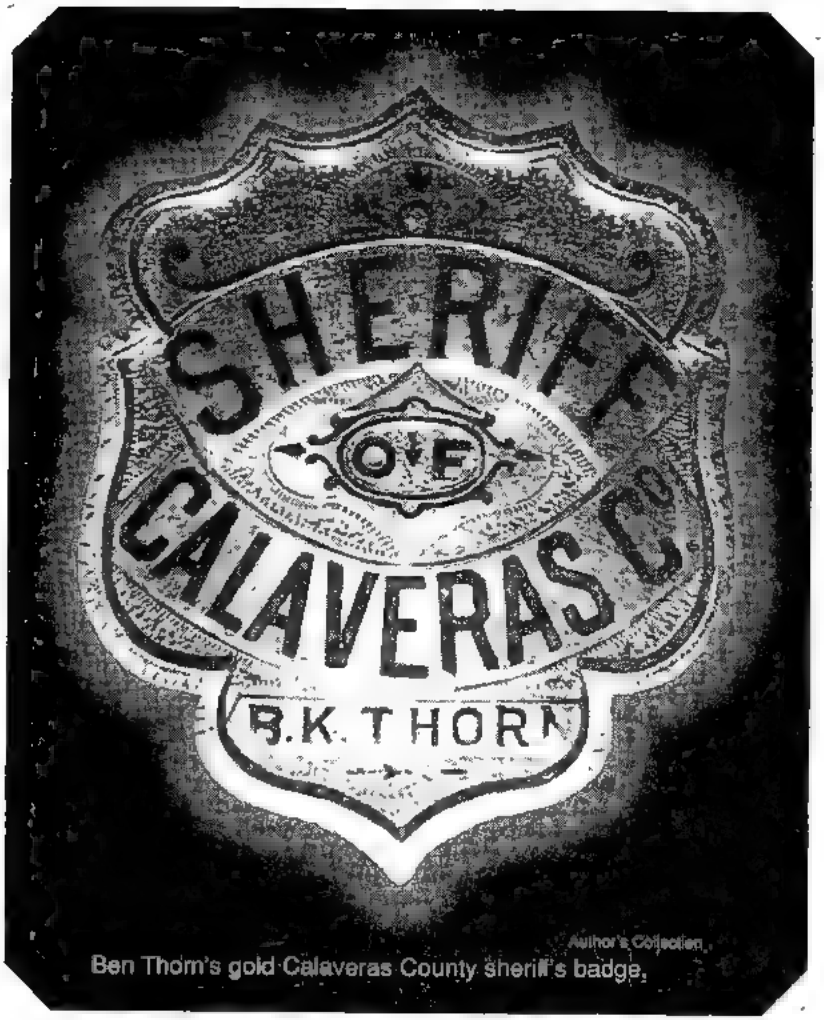


Author's Collection.
Ben Thorn's gold Calaveras County sheriff's badge.

days; seventeen witnesses testified. It was no secret that Brown's comrades planned to take him away from Thorn. Ben called on some of his friends to help him guard the prisoners during the night, but all quickly found that they had urgent business elsewhere. Thorn ordered the barkeeper not to sell or give away any liquor. He put his prisoners in a corner, sat down on a box next to them, and with his six-gun in hand, waited alone for daylight.

The friends of Brown and Owens gathered around, glowering and swearing at the young deputy. But the six-shooter in Thorn's fist and the determined glint in his eye cowed them. In the morning the hearing continued and both desperadoes were held to answer to the charges. By now Longhair Sam's friends were becoming desperate. One of them, Lafayette "Punch" Choisser, lunged forward and handed Brown a loaded revolver, calling on him to shoot Thorn. Ben snatched the pistol and felled Choisser with a blow to the jaw. Then another of Brown's gang, Alf Richardson, decided on a new tactic. He swore out arrest warrants before Judge Spencer against two notorious Chilean gunmen in the crowd, believing that they would resist arrest and kill Thorn. Ben knew that the charges were false, but the warrants had been issued and it was his duty to serve them. Much to the chagrin of Brown's gang, the two Chileans did not resist the nervy young officer and submitted quietly to the arrest.

Eventually the charges against Bunty Owens were dropped, but Longhair Sam was later convicted of manslaughter and he served two years in San Quentin prison. In 1859 he crossed the Sierra Nevada to the new strike in the Comstock Lode. There he quickly established himself as a "chief," by killing three more men in pistol and Bowie knife fights. He met his end on his thirtieth birthday, July 6, 1861, when a peaceful innkeeper, Henry Van Sickle, brought him down with a fatal load of buckshot. A coroner's jury rightly found that the man-killer had "come to his death from a just dispensation of an all-wise Providence."

Within a few months after his capture of Sam Brown, Ben Thorn was again in the saddle after dangerous outlaws. On August 6, 1855, in the so-called Rancheria Tragedy, a gang of Hispanic bandidos raided the mining camp of Rancheria, in Amador County, just north of Calaveras. They killed five men and a woman in cold blood, looted the town's hotel and store, and escaped with all the horses from the livery stable. News of the brutal raid created the wildest excitement. By morning hundreds of miners had poured into Rancheria. The killing of innocent people, including a woman, was beyond the pale, and while some men started in pursuit of the gang, others began rounding up local Mexicans. They lynched three suspects, then drove all Mexicans from town and burned their dwellings. The terrified Mexicans fled and took refuge in nearby Mile Gulch. Local Indians, angered by the death of one of their compadres and egged on by some of the mob, followed and attacked Mexican men, women, and children in the gulch. At least eight were killed as they tried to escape from the ravine. Another Hispanic suspect was lynched at Gopher Flat, seven miles from Rancheria. Then the mob drove fifty Mexicans from Gopher Flat and destroyed their homes. Another mob torched Chile Flat in Drytown and burned the Catholic church to the ground. The town's Chileans and Mexicans likewise fled.

While senseless mob violence was engulfing the county, Amador County's young sheriff, William A. Phoenix, was busy tracking the real bandits. He first struck a false trail north of Rancheria. Realizing his error, Phoenix led his posse back to Jackson, the county seat, where he found that the gang had headed

William B. Secrest Collection

San Andreas, county seat of Calaveras County from 1866 to present. Although this street scene was taken in 1888, it looked much as it did during the Gold Rush. It was Ben Thorn's home from 1859 until his death.

south and crossed the Mokelumne River into Calaveras County. The sheriff, with several possemen, rode to Mokelumne Hill that night. There they learned that Calaveras County Sheriff Charles Clarke had caught up with the mounted bandits at Texas Bar on the Calaveras River. Clarke and his men, one of whom was undoubtedly Ben Thorn, had engaged the bandidos in a sharp gunfight and managed to shoot and capture one of them. He gave his name as Manuel Castro and admitted taking part in the Rancheria raid but claimed that he had not killed anyone. Castro identified eight other men by their first names as the other bandits, including an American named Gregory. Sheriff Phoenix detailed two of his possemen to return Castro to Jackson in a buggy. But no sooner had they appeared on the town's streets than a mob seized the prisoner and hanged him on the spot.

Phoenix, with Sheriff Clarke, Ben Thorn, and several other possemen, set out on the outlaws' trail. At Jenny Lind they heard that the bandits were camped on the Stanislaus River, but when the lawmen arrived the gang was gone. They trailed the killers south to Jamestown on August 12 where they recovered several of the horses that had been stolen from Rancheria. The animals were half dead from exhaustion, and the lawmen now knew they were pushing the bandits hard.

There was a Mexican settlement at Campo Salvado, four miles south, and the officers decided to search it. Riding into the camp, Ben Thorn and the other lawmen pulled up in front of an adobe fandango house and dismounted. The officers stepped inside in time to see a Mexican girl motioning toward someone behind a door. It was the bandits, and they burst into the room, six-gun muzzles flashing. Sheriff Phoenix fell dead with a bullet in his heart. In a rapid blaze of gunfire, two possemen and several bandidos were wounded. The outlaw who had slain Phoenix fell to the floor, and one of the officers killed him with an axe. The rest of the band leaped into their saddles and fled.

A boy ran up to the lawmen and told them that a wounded bandit had crawled into a nearby tent. The officers followed a blood trail to the tent and set it afire. Moments later the bandido leaped out, screaming in pain. Flames leaped from his clothes and hair as well as from the muzzles of six-shooters clutched in each fist. Ben Thorn, Sheriff Clarke, and the rest riddled him with pistol balls and he fell dead in a smoldering heap. Then they brought Sheriff Phoenix's body into Sonora where he was buried by the Masonic fraternity. After the funeral, Sheriff Clarke learned that forty Mexican suspects had been rounded up in Columbia, a few miles to the north. Clarke's posse rode there and took a close look at them. One, Rafael Escobar, was identified as one of the gang. Escobar soon confessed, but then recanted. Clarke sent him back to Jackson with a guard, but a mob seized him and strung him up on Jackson's famous hanging tree, where half a dozen desperadoes had already met their fates in previous years. This was the last lynching in what became known as the Rancheria Tragedy. In all, at least twenty-three people had been slain. For sheer brutality and senseless violence by Mexican bandits and Anglo mobs it had few equals during the Gold Rush.

One of Ben Thorn's most

notable exploits was his encounter with Santiago Molino, a dangerous desperado who was reported to have killed six men in the mining country.

Born in Chile in 1820, Molino left his native country during the Gold Rush, partly to search for gold and partly to escape prosecution for murder. He came to the placers near San Andreas, Calaveras County, in 1849 at the head of a group of fifty peons, and, as Ben Thorn later recalled, "proceeded to make all the money out of them that he could." He later moved north to Greenwood Valley in El Dorado County, where he settled with his wife and four children.

Molino hired a local blacksmith, Daniel Andrews, to make him a huge dagger, two feet long and weighing eight-and-a-half pounds. On the night of December 14, 1856, Molino and a fellow Chilean quarreled with Andrews. While the blacksmith and the Chilean were clinched in combat on the ground, Molino seized the new dagger. With a single thrust he plunged it through Andrews and the Chilean, killing them both. Molino fled and when word of Andrews' murder spread, enraged American miners burned the Chilean quarter. Citizens of Greenwood Valley and Georgetown offered a $1,000 reward, dead or alive, but Molino repeatedly escaped capture. A fugitive for two years, he was accused of killing a man at Drytown in Amador County, one in Calaveras, and another in Tuolumne. By 1858 his wife had left him, and he vowed to kill her and his children.

Ben Thorn particularly wanted to capture Molino, and he eventually received a tip, perhaps from Molino's wife, that the outlaw's hideout was a cabin near Colorado, a small mining camp eight miles from Mariposa. Thorn secured an arrest warrant and on the evening of January 4, 1859, he rode into the camp with a fellow Calaveras County deputy sheriff, Fred Wesson. The officers soon learned that Molino had a small log cabin in a greasewood thicket, six hundred yards from the camp. Molino lived with three other Chileans, and Thorn was warned that they "would make a desperate fight for him." Fearing that Molino would quickly learn of their presence, the two lawmen wasted no time. They approached the cabin in the darkness and Thorn knocked on the door.

"Who's there?" a voice demanded.

"A friend," Thorn replied in Spanish.

"What friend?"

"Oh, never mind that," Thorn carelessly replied, in the best Spanish he could muster. "It's a friend. Open the door."

The door was opened and the lawmen stepped inside. Two men were in the cabin, and Ben Thorn immediately recognized one, from his description, as the wanted killer. The other, who proved to be a Chilean desperado named Dominguez, stood near the fireplace. Without missing a beat, Thorn casually said to Molino, "Isn't your name Manuel Inocito?"

"No. Silvia," replied the outlaw.

"Where are you from immediately before coming to this place?" asked Thorn.

"I am from Los Menitos," the killer responded, then suddenly lunged toward the bed and snatched a large six-shooter from under the blankets. As he turned to fire, Fred Wesson seized the pistol barrel. At the same time Ben Thorn took Molino by the throat and shoved his own six-gun into the desperado's face. Santiago Molino wisely surrendered, and Thorn told him he was under arrest.

"Very well," Molino replied. "If you are officers I will go, but don't hold me. I'll go without holding."

Thorn clutched his prisoner's shirt collar as they stooped to exit the low front.

But Molino suddenly lunged forward, tearing his shirt completely off his back. The outlaw started at a dead run for the chaparral. Ben Thorn, pistol in hand, charged after him through the blackness and the brush, yelling in Spanish, "Stop, or I'll shoot!"

Molino instead bent over to make himself a smaller target and

Author's Collection

Sheriff Ben Thorn, with badge visible, about 1890.

continued his streak through the chaparral. It was a fatal mistake. He was wearing white canvas pants, which provided a clear target in the darkness. After seventy-five yards Thorn fired twice and missed. By now they had run more than two hundred yards from the cabin, and Thorn was forty feet behind the desperado. He fired a third time and the ball slammed into Molino's hips and ranged upward, tearing through the stomach, lungs, and main artery near the heart. The outlaw dropped, but as Thorn raced forward he regained his feet and glared with hatred at the lawman.

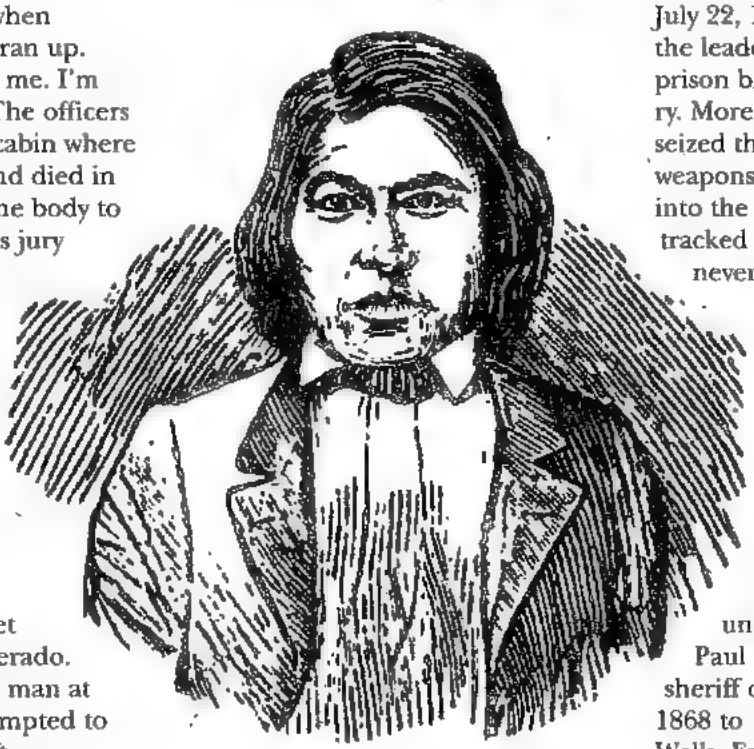
Thorn took his arm, when Wesson and Dominguez ran up.

"Dominguez, come to me. I'm dying," Molino gasped. The officers helped him back to the cabin where he sank to the ground and died in great agony. They took the body to Colorado and a coroner's jury was summoned. A crowd of more than fifty angry Chileans gathered, but made no move to interfere. The jury found that the killing was justifiable. Ben Thorn never claimed the $1,000 reward and it was never paid to him.

Jesus Villalobo (pronounced Bealoba) was yet another gold camp desperado. He had shot and killed a man at Jenny Lind who had attempted to arrest him for horse theft.

Captured and lodged in the Calaveras County jail in Mokelumne Hill, Villalobo was tried, convicted of murder, and sentenced to death. His attorneys appealed to the California Supreme Court, which upheld the conviction. Villalobo was then sentenced to be hanged on March 19, 1861. Four days before the execution date, at the request of his mother, Villalobo was taken out of the jail to a nearby daguerreotype gallery to be photographed. He was accompanied by Ben Thorn and Tom Paul, the brother of Sheriff Bob Paul.

After the photograph was taken, Thorn and Paul started back to the jail with their prisoner. The officers had foolishly failed to handcuff him. Paul told Thorn that he had forgotten something and had to go back, leaving Ben alone in charge of the killer. Thorn continued on toward the jail, keeping Villalobo eight feet in front of him. As they neared the jail, Villalobo whirled around, cried low, and charged Thorn. Grabbing the lawman in a bear hug, Villalobo pulled Thorn's pistol from its holster. The two struggled desperately for the weapon, but the burly desperado managed to wrest it from Thorn. Now the officer was fighting for his life. Mustering his strength, he threw his assailant to the ground and straddled him, but Villalobo cocked the six-gun and rammed it into Thorn's belly. The deputy knew he had not a second to lose. With a lightning-fast movement he knocked the pistol barrel away with his left hand and rammed the forefinger of his right hand as far up the outlaw's nostril as it would go. It caused such instant and excruciating pain that Villalobo's grip relaxed and he dropped the six-shooter, screaming in agony.



William B. Secrest Collection

Jesus Villalobo. This contemporary woodcut was probably made from the daguerreotype taken at the time he tried to kill Ben Thorn in 1861.

Ben Thorn held his prisoner securely and yelled for help. Soon several of his friends rushed up and helped him return Villalobo to his cell. Now the killer showed great remorse and apologized profusely to Thorn. Villalobo's lawyers had been fighting vigorously to save his neck, and two days later he received a reprieve from the governor, who commuted his sentence to life imprisonment. On April 8 Thorn transported him to San Quentin prison. The governor's mercy was misplaced, however. A year later, on July 22, 1862, Villalobo was one of the leaders of the biggest mass prison break in San Quentin's history. More than two hundred convicts seized the warden, captured weapons from the armory, and fled into the hills. Although many were tracked down, Jesus Villalobo was never recaptured.

After the Gold Rush many Forty-Niners drifted on to new mining frontiers. Ben Thorn, however, stayed, married, built a mansion (which is still standing) in San Andreas, raised two daughters, and became a power in local politics. He served as undersheriff for Sheriff Bob Paul from 1860 to 1864 and was sheriff of Calaveras County from 1868 to 1876, then worked as a Wells, Fargo detective, and again was county sheriff from 1880 to 1903. During the 1880s and 1890s he was, next to his friend Tom Cunningham of Stockton, the most famous sheriff in California. When he died on November 15, 1905, the San Francisco *Call* gave simple but elegant praise: "In the days when the laws were loose, when the bandit, the stage robber, and the horse thief abounded, when life was cheap and men lived in the frontier stage of existence, Thorn's name was a terror to the criminal."

EDWARD BURLESON:

Archives and Information Services, Texas State Library, Austin

Edward Burleson, from an original daguerreotype taken in San Marcos, Texas, 1850.

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A MAN OF Blood

By David F. Crosby

Edward Burleson earned his place in Texas history by fighting Indians and Mexicans. He excelled at the task. One pioneer woman said of Burleson: "The only time I could get a good night's sleep was when I knew Colonel Burleson was about."

Fighting Indians became an obsession with Burleson. His own wife, Sarah Burleson, resented her husband's long absences from home. Once when he mounted to ride off on an extended Indian patrol, she asked him to stay because winter was approaching and he hadn't cut any firewood. He rode off in pursuit of Indians anyway. She tore wood shingles off the roof and used those for firewood.

Why did Burleson react so strongly to marauding Indians? Prejudice is not the answer; Burleson's closest friend was a Tonkawa. Chief Placido and Edward Burleson shared a friendship severed only by death. Burleson allowed Indians to camp on his estate and his children played with Indian children. The answer to the riddle begins on December 15, 1798, in North Carolina.

Edward Burleson was born to a family of pioneers on December 15, 1798, in North Carolina's Blue Ridge Mountains. His father, James, had bad luck with both land titles and Indians. James' father died in an Indian ambush while trying to cross the Clynch River in Tennessee in 1784. A few years later, Indians killed James' brother. Abbey Burleson McFadden, James' sister, shot and scalped, refused to die.

The Burleson family, always on the move and on the frontier, endured hostile Indian attacks for generations. The family developed a deep hatred for Indians. John Holland Jenkins, who knew the Burleson family, recorded their feelings on the subject: "They owed a debt of vengeance to all Indians."

In 1807, James suddenly packed up his family and moved to Tennessee rather than face a lawsuit to settle title to his land. A new home didn't change his luck. The federal government evicted him from his homestead as part of a land deal with the Chickasaw Indians.

Once again the family moved to a new frontier. This time they settled in Mississippi Territory, in what is now northern Alabama. It was there, at age thirteen, that Edward fought his first battle and proved to all his natural abilities as a warrior.

During the War of 1812, a war party of Creeks murdered four white families on the north side of the Tennessee River. Captain Jonathan Burleson, Edward's uncle, raised a company of minute men to give chase. Edward, despite his age, talked his father into letting him join the expedition.

The Creeks, thinking themselves safe, took the time to sit around some old stumps drinking stolen brandy and playing ball while they cooked a meal. When the minute men appeared, the Creeks yelled out, "Good friends; good friends!" Then they signaled for the white men to dismount. Captain Burleson put his men in a battle line and then rode ahead and dismounted, offering his hand to the war chief. The Creek pulled out a butcher knife and tried to stab Captain Burleson in the heart. Burleson skillfully sidestepped the thrust, but the war chief put himself between Burleson and his men. The minute men couldn't open fire without endangering their captain.

Edward, the teenage novice, rose to the occasion. He drew his pistol, spurred his horse forward, pulled up next to the war chief, and shot him in the head.

Burleson ordered a charge and the Indian raiding party died to a man. After the battle, a pleased Uncle Jonathan told Edward, "My noble boy, I am proud of you, and now let it be the business of your life to kill these red devils, who have not only killed your grandfather and uncle, but shot, tomahawked, and scalped your Aunt Abbey, and have stained this continent with blood."

Edward Burleson took that charge to heart. He followed his father to fight in the Creek War, and then later served as a captain in the Missouri militia, and as a lieutenant colonel and colonel of Tennessee militia. By the time he moved to Texas in 1831, the Burlesons' last move, he was an experienced soldier. There he rose to general of militia and colonel of regulars in the Texas army. During the Mexican War, he served with the United States army as a major and aide-de-camp to a General Henderson.

When he wasn't in the saddle, Burleson fought his battles with words. In 1841, the voters elected him vice president of the Republic of Texas. When he died of pneumonia in Austin, Texas, on December 26, 1851, he held the state office of president pro tempore of the Senate.

Edward Burleson remarked to his brother, Rubus Burleson, shortly before his death: "My life has been a rude and rough one, I have been a man of blood from my youth."

At his grave site, the eulogy began, "The hero of thirty battles, he was never known to call retreat." It concluded, "Your body is buried in peace...."

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The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

William Crush hired photographers Martin and Jervis Deane and J.L. Bergstrom to capture the dramatic collision of two Missouri, Kansas & Texas trains at Crush, Texas. In this image, the two trains "shake hands" before the near-fatal publicity stunt.

Wreck and Ruin

By Nancy M. Peterson

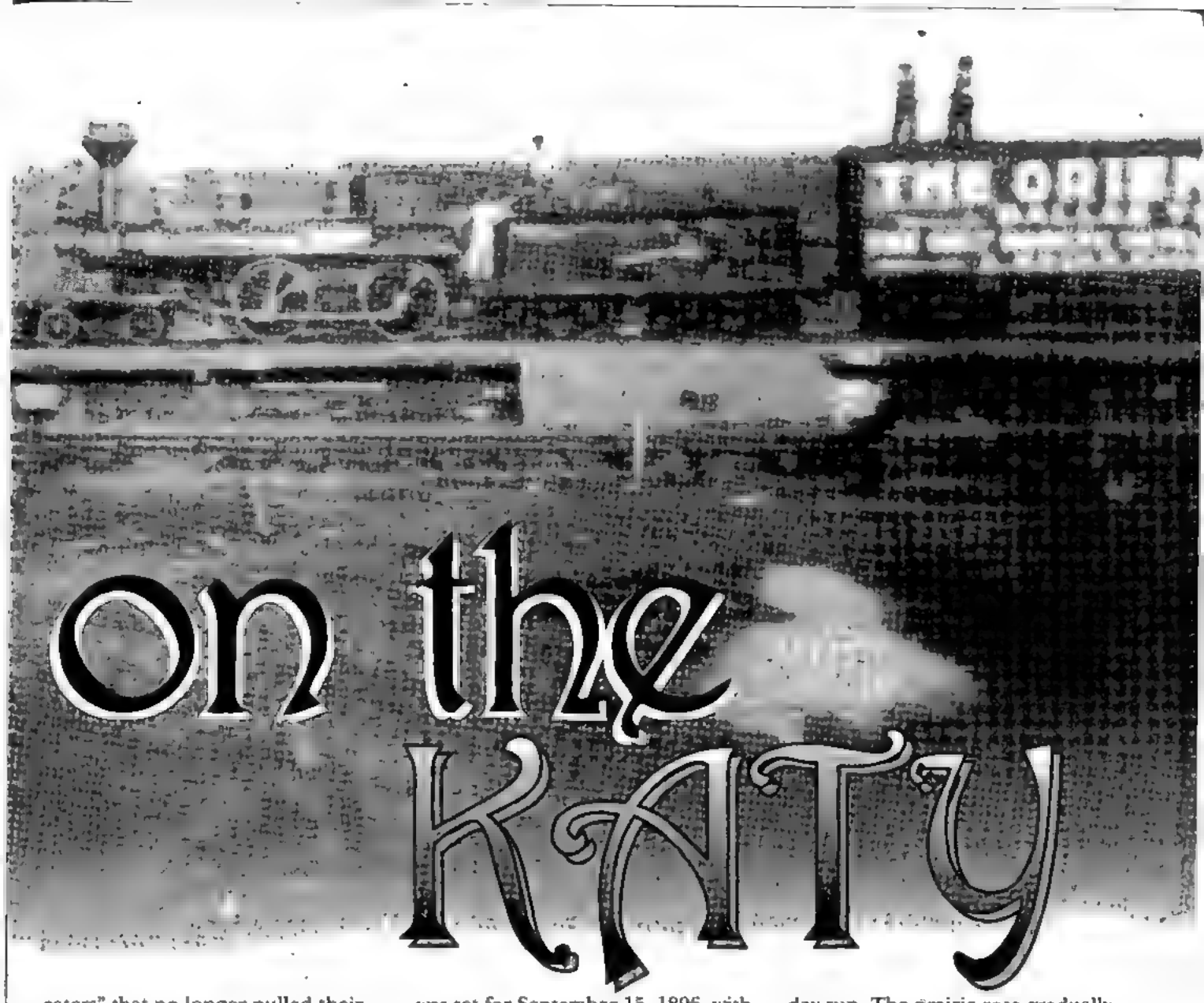
The stunt William G. Crush urged his new employer to approve that summer of 1896 sounded preposterous. Ordinarily, railway press agents such as Crush devoutly hoped newspaper reports of wrecks on their line could be confined to small type on inside pages. Yet Bill Crush had just proposed that the Missouri, Kansas & Texas railroad attract customers by having a spectacular train wreck and telling the whole nation about it.

There was more: Crush intended not only to tell everyone about the wreck, he wanted them to come see it happen. He'd haul them there in M-K-T cars to a spot on M-K-T's new mainline sixteen miles north of Waco, Texas.

The road's president, Henry C. Rouse, had told Crush their company needed to alert the public that the "T" that changed the Missouri Kansas & Eastern Railway to the "Katy" meant more than a popular nickname. It meant the line was ready for business in Texas all the way to Galveston. Challenged by rival systems and a national depression, the line needed more people settled along its route to assure dependable revenue. How could a train wreck possibly attract the business they needed?

It was a natural, Crush assured him. The agent eagerly explained that the Columbus, Hocking Valley and Toledo railway had staged a similar stunt near Cleveland, Ohio, that spring. It was said to have attracted 40,000 curious spectators. Wrecks—like other disasters—aroused a morbid curiosity that people would travel miles to satisfy.

Crush declared his promotional skills could attract an even larger crowd to such an exhibition in Texas. He was sure if he offered people a chance to witness a high-speed, head-end collision, he'd sell out every excursion car he could get to the scene. The daring spectacle would make headlines in papers all over the country both before and after the event—priceless publicity for the Katy's Texas connections. They could use old, outmoded locomotives at little cost, "coal



on the KATY

eaters" that no longer pulled their weight. Even better, the modest fares spectators paid to get there—Crush predicted as many as 50,000 viewers—would put hard cash in the company's bank account.

Although Rouse had hired Crush for his showmanship, he hesitated. He knew Crush was on good terms with P.T. Barnum and his name was familiar to dozens of editors. But would enough Texans attend to pay for destroying rolling stock?

Crush had no doubts. Dramatically, he staked his reputation and everything he had that he'd make it a success or "bust a trace chain."

But couldn't the collision be dangerous to spectators? Rouse checked with his mechanical department. Only one official seemed to think there might be some risk. The date was set for September 15, 1896, with the climax scheduled for late afternoon.

Crush went into action. Newspapers headlined the spectacle-to-come even before the location was definite. Soon a pasture south of the small town of West, Texas, was rented; fences and walls along the Katy's track brightened with posters ballyhooing "The Great Train Wreck." The flamboyant event fit the Gay Nineties spirit. "People talked of little else," wrote a *Dallas Morning News* reporter. "Politics, the chief entertainment at Texas crossroads, went into hibernation until the wreck was over."

The agent placed the track in a carefully selected pasture that sloped downward west-to-east. There would be no squinting into the late-day sun. The prairie rose gradually to the north and south, forming a natural amphitheater with the Katy track at center stage. Fields of cotton and corn, broken by an occasional farmhouse roof, made up the backdrop. The site, named Crush, Texas, for its founder, immediately swarmed with workmen. Some crews threw down a lengthy siding, others hammered together a 2,100-foot "station" platform, then added a small viewing stand for dignitaries.

Determined that Katy customers would be well cared for, Crush ordered a huge Ringling Brothers Circus tent set up to serve meals under the direction of the Katy's dining superintendent. A dozen smaller tents were devoted to lemonade and stronger drink. Those whose thirst could be

quenched by water would have only to walk to one of eight tank cars, reach for the nearest among hundreds of faucets, and fill a Katy tin cup with cold, clear artesian water brought up from Waco. If boredom threatened before the main event, fiddle bands, a midway, and a medicine show would hasten time's passage.

Realistic enough to know a few unscrupulous attendees might try to take advantage of the crowd's holiday mood to pinch unguarded wallets, Crush hired 200 constables and provided them with a wooden jail to hold any miscreants.

As soon as Katy crews got word of the scheme they began to speculate. How dangerous would such a run be? Who would get the assignment? It was September 8 before twenty-five-year-old Frank Barnes, called to master mechanic C.T. McElvaney's office, learned that McElvaney had picked the engineers, and one of them, engineer Charles E. Stanton, wanted Frank to stoke the firebox on No. 999. Engineer Charles Cain and fireman S.M. Dickerson would crew No. 1001.

Meantime, the aging stars of the show got their stage makeup in the Katy's shop in Denison on the Oklahoma border. Built in 1869, both were thirty-five ton, diamond-stacked 4-4-0's.

Barnes walked into the shop to stare at the gaudiest iron horses he'd ever seen. His engine, numbered 999 after the locomotive that held the world's speed record, sported a startling green coat trimmed in brilliant red. Colors were reversed on their challenger, which reminded a reporter of "a bride arrayed for the wedding." Six empty box cars were coupled behind each combatant, their sides covered with canvas brightly painted to advertise a Dallas hotel, the circus, and the Katy.

Agent Crush worked every angle. When the garish trains were ready, he sent No. 999 south to Waco via Fort Worth, with orders to promote the event at every stop. He routed No. 1001 through Dallas, with similar hoopla.

Once on the site, the crews began practice runs. Each locomotive had been carefully reconditioned by McElvaney to assure flawless performance. They were to start two miles apart, accelerate to a mile a minute and collide exactly midway. Crush was insistent: the engines must meet directly in front of the crowd, where he placed a sign, "Point of Collision." He was determined no viewer should be disappointed. More important, the team of Waco photographers he'd hired, brothers Martin and Jervis Deane, would be stationed close-by, ready to preserve the spectacle on film.

The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

This scene, taken from the photographers' perch, shows the crowd that gathered to watch the Katy wreck. The final crowd numbered close to 30,000.

Each crew knew it must move its train from a standing start to the Point of Collision in exactly two minutes. Each engine had exactly one mile to cover. The moderate downgrade had to be factored in. Because, as Barnes explained later, no two locomotives operate exactly alike both crews spent three days making trial runs. With each train moving at a projected speed of eighty-eight-feet-per-second, there was no room for miscalculation.

Stanton and Barnes made trial runs until they were certain what worked for No. 999. With the steam-control lever at low, Stanton would pull the throttle to a predetermined spot. As the great drivers ground forward, they would count sixteen exhausts, notch the steam lever next to high, and jump. They placed a clamp at that spot on the throttle and carefully removed all tools, spare pins, and loose objects that could become airborne in the crash.

One small object remained. Deep in the sandbox of No. 999 lay a watch made by the jewelry company contracted to inspect M-K-T watches and clocks. Barnes saw a representative of the jeweler bury the timepiece with fond hopes of the advertisements they could run later if it ticked on after the crash.

Crush thought he'd considered every possible mishap. All couplings joining the cars were secured to prevent the cars from separating after the collision. The steam lines to the air pumps were disconnected, so no mishap could activate the air brakes. As a final precaution, once the trains were at their starting positions, the tracks behind each would be cut; if one train jumped the track, the other could not run wild. All they needed now was the crowd.

Tuesday, September 15, dawned clear and bright, perfect Indian summer weather. By 10 AM the excursion trains were rolling in from Dallas and Fort Worth. Excited passengers, who paid two dollars each for a ride to the spectacle and back, poured from the cars. The reporter identified doctors, lawyers, and merchants with their families, many of the men in suits, their stiff,

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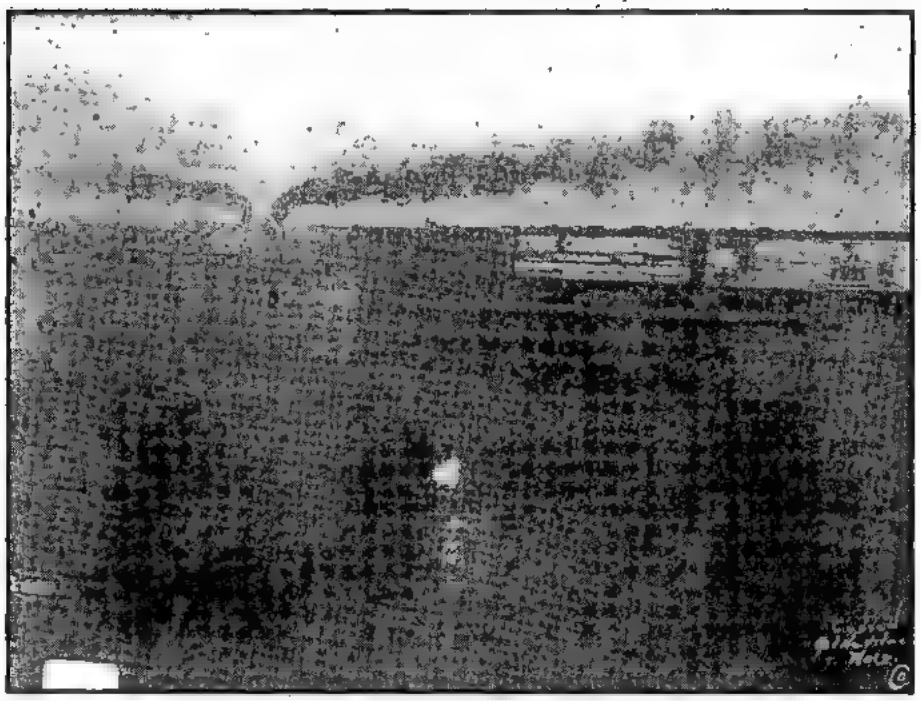
white collars centered with dark ties. But farmers also tramped down the steps, with craftsmen, clerks in shirt sleeves and suspenders, a mix of people representing "every class and grade of society."

Many of the ladies, in long, full, mutton-sleeved gowns, opened parasols as they stepped off the cars into the hot sun. Crush had anticipated even this. Playing the part of grand marshal to the hilt, mounted on a prancing horse, he divided the crowd, directing the women and children to a hillside that was at least partially shaded. The men were left in the sun, closer to the safety line, which they were warned not to cross.

The crowd of 2,000 locals quickly swelled as special trains from more distant places, puffed in, one every twelve minutes for a time. Hundreds of other people who lived nearby came in buggies, or rode horseback or simply walked over to see the free event. The crowd packing the slopes might not have totaled Crush's expected 50,000, but the most conservative estimate reported he'd drawn 30,000 to the Texas pasture.

Many spectators discovered the Katy lunch tent offered a specially created frankfurter, among other tasty, reasonably priced lunches. Others opened their own picnic hampers. They flocked around the locomotives to question the crews, noted the deluxe private cars of the line's general officers, half-listened to a politician's speech, eagerly speculated about what they were about to see, and restlessly wondered when. Excursion trains continued to pull in. The scheduled four o'clock starting time came and went.

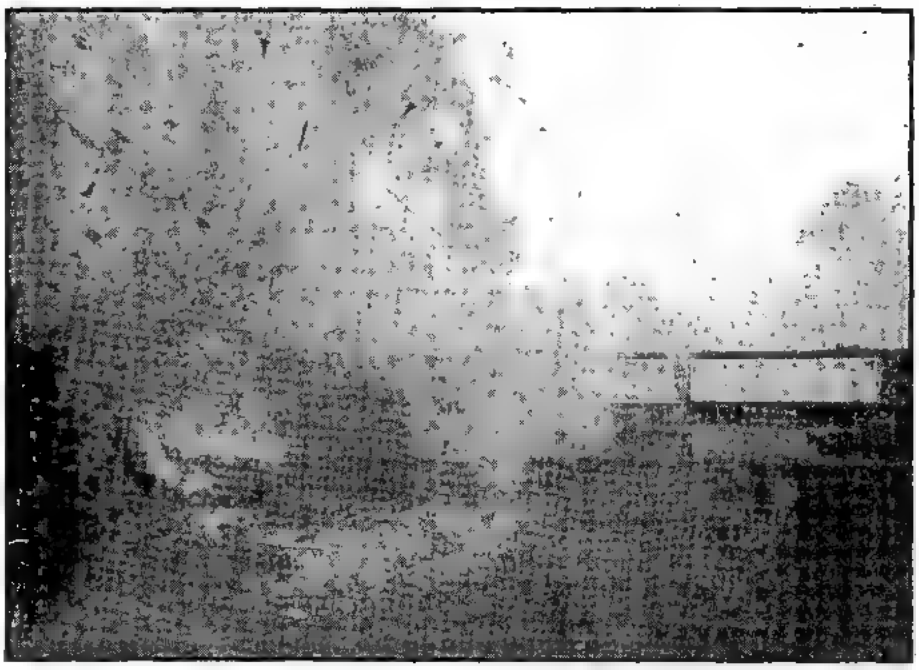
At five o'clock they finally had something to cheer. Each locomotive, brass sparkling in the sun, chugged forward to meet, as if prizefighters touching gloves, in their final ceremony. Their diamond stacks, drive wheels, tenders shrieked in red and green. Ribbons streamed from the bells, and inside No. 999, fireman Barnes had a pristine new bell rope to pull. Engineer Stanton's seat of command was newly cushioned.



The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

Missouri, Kansas & Texas Engines No 999 and No 1001 race toward their final confrontation. The sides of the trains displayed advertisements for local businesses and a circus.

On their special platform, within 100 feet of the Point of Collision, photographers Martin and Jervis Deane also thought they were ready for anything. Martin was to take the combatants' final portrait. They'd hired another Waco photographer, J.L. Bergstrom, to shoot the instant of impact, and Jervis Deane would record the aftermath. As the rival locomotives posed in their splendor and the crowd cheered, Martin focused carefully and took the shot he would later title, "Shaking Hands."



The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

Seconds after the initial impact, the boilers on the two engines exploded, sending debris into the crowd of spectators. Photographer Jervis Deane lost an eye when a bolt hit him as he took this photo.

All was ready for the main event. But as the trains backed to their starting posts, the crowd's excitement got the best of them. They pushed heedlessly through the safety ropes, crowded the siding, pushed within a few yards of the track. Crush had to gallop his horse up and down the restraining line, urging the crowd back. He called on the constables for help and, with dusk coming on, finally resorted to the only effective threat: the show would not go on until the crowd moved back.

Yet, even though forced to be stern, he couldn't have been too unhappy. The *News* reporter described Crush that day as "wreathed in smiles." His crowd was there, as he'd predicted, too agitated to stand still, breathless with anticipation. The publicity had run to columns—far better than he'd hoped. Crush had put his reputation on the line and he'd delivered what he promised. He felt his judgment had been validated.

In the cab of No. 999, black smoke streaming from its funnel and boiler safety values popping, Stanton and Barnes waited tensely for their signal to open the throttle. Crush had planned the sequence carefully. At his signal, a telegrapher on the viewing stand would instantly relay the word to telegraphers at each starting point. "Time crawled by and the signal did not come," Barnes remembered. They wondered why.

Finally corralled behind the safety line, the crowd, nerves drawing ever tighter, strained to see any motion, glances darting from Crush to the distant locomotives and back. They jockeyed for position, stood on tiptoe, stepped up on wagon seats, unwilling to miss the first jet of steam forcing the ponderous drive wheels forward. Egbert McFadden, a young spectator born in Tennessee, decided the perch he'd chosen in a mesquite tree near the crash site was not as good as he'd hoped. He dropped to the ground. Immediately Ernest Darnall, thirteen-year-old son of Colonel Darnall of Bremond, Texas,

scrambled to the vacant branch.

At last the two-minute warning came. Crush raised his arm. Stop watches ticked off 119 seconds and Crush's arm descended. "Go!"

Telegraph keys chattered. For a moment all the crowd heard was its own hysterical roar. Then, beneath the continuous shriek of the engines' whistles came a rumble of wheels from both left and right. Unexpectedly, a series of small explosions began, each quicker and closer than the last, as the engines accelerated. The 1,000 torpedoes Crush had spaced along the track detonated in turn, a nerve-jarring countdown to the impending impact. A huge dust cloud billowed behind each racing train. The racket of torpedoes built toward a crescendo.

As the locomotives rocketed together, some of the spectators could not bear the tension. Weak and faint, they turned away at the last instant. But there was no escaping the earth-jarring concussion as the behemoths plowed together with ear-splitting violence. The leading box cars climbed atop one another with the screech of timbers instantly mashed to splinters.

Bergstrom squeezed off his shot. Ears still echoing from the crash, the crowd had not even time to let go its breath when another incredible blast rent the air. Both locomotives' boilers exploded. Thousands of pieces of red-hot shrapnel were hurled into the air. Screaming in panic, people tried to dodge a hail of deadly debris that spread out hundreds of yards. The cap sheaf of a smoke stack, half a drive wheel, a cylinder head with two feet of piston, and lengths of heavy brake chain gyrated in wild flight before descending on the terrified mass of people.

Some saw large debris coming at them and dodged in time. Others had no chance. As Dewitt Barnes of Hewitt stood between his wife and another woman; a flying wedge of metal ended his life. The women were untouched. A length of wrecking chain whipped at Earnest Darnall; the teenager fell from the mesquite tree, his skull split by the hook at the chain's end. Another teenager, Roy Kendrick, was relatively lucky; an iron bolt made an ugly, but not life threatening, hole in his leg. However, his good fortune came at the expense of the wife of a farmer named Overstreet. The bolt's velocity had been slowed when it struck Mrs. Overstreet, knocking her unconscious as she rode in a passing wagon

Bits of metal fired like bullets into the crowd. Bergstrom instinctively ducked and dodged. Ears ringing from the blast, he gathered his senses and looked around. Jervis Deanee lay prostrate on the platform, blood streaming over his face, his right eye impaled by a four-inch bolt. As the shrieks of terror began to subside and the cries and groans of the injured could be heard, the uninjured photographers yelled for a doctor. A spectator pushed his way through the crowd, identified himself as a physician and bent over

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The Texas Collection, Baylor University, Waco, Texas

Left and above: Despite the carnage, spectators rushed to the wreck of Engines No. 999 and No. 1001 to gather souvenirs.

Jervis. Word of the doctor's presence spread and others brought bleeding victims for his care.

Rumors flew nearly as fast as the shrapnel: Four men are dead and five more injured. Mrs. Overstreet has died. NO, she has rallied. Millenberger cannot survive. The *News* reporter tried to fight his way through the frantic mob to confirm the facts.

But thousands in the crowd, gawking at the smoking heap of hot iron and splintered timbers, felt driven to confirm what they had just witnessed. With a wild yell they pushed through the safety line, tore down pasture fences and trampled sage brush and anything else that stood between them and what they simply had to see to believe, to comprehend. Nearly 150,000 pounds of iron horse, which instead of rearing up against each other in battle had rammed straight ahead, lay telescoped by the impact. Both tenders and half the box cars were melded into an unidentifiable mass. Only five of twelve box cars were still upright. Jaws agape, the viewers stood transfixed.

Yet, their awe was short-lived. In another instant they were scrambling over the steaming wreckage, risking burns to take home a souvenir. The *News* reporter estimated that at least three-fourths of the spectators carried away a ghoulish remembrance.

Unfortunately for the jeweler, no one discovered a ticking watch. In fact, as Barnes explained later, "they found very little of the sandbox and none of the watch."

Barnes and the rest of the crewmen had jumped to safety, as planned. When the second explosion spewed forth a dark cloud of steam and engine parts, they knew with a sick certainty what had happened. In spite of assurances to the contrary, the locomotive boilers had exploded. "We watched numbly," Barnes recounted, "and prayed nobody had been killed or hurt." Then they rode a wrecker slowly into the chaos.

When the casualties were finally confirmed, everyone was relieved the list was not longer. Two were dead, the man from Hewitt and the boy from Bremond, and Jervis Deane's eye was gone for good. The half-dozen others seriously injured eventually recovered, with a chagrined Katy management willingly paying every claim. Deane reportedly settled for $10,000 and a lifetime pass on all M-K-T routes. He may well have ridden in a train driven by Frank Barnes, because Barnes was promoted to engineer in 1898 and he stayed with the line until retiring in 1950.

Bill Crush, who watched with horror as his triumph turned into bloody disaster, was quickly informed the Katy had no further need for his ideas. Still, it was his careful planning that had everyone singing the company's praises all day until the fatal moment, that had wrecking trains and crews ready, that managed to herd the throngs of distracted excursionists onto the return train going in the right direction, that had the line cleared and open for regular business in three hours' time. The next day President Rouse rehired him, and he remained head of the passenger department for many years.

Crush's "Great Train Wreck" probably cost the company more hard cash that it brought in, but it did indeed imprint the Katy's name in countless minds. Who could forget Crush, Texas, which was founded, grew to 30,000, achieved infamy, and was abandoned—all in one day. Fleeting though it was, it put the Katy on the map, and a number of spectators who had been citizens for a day saw potential in the valley and returned to settle there. The village of West, population 200 in 1890, boasted 851 residents in 1900.

The town named for the passenger agent did not survive, but his deed impressed composer Scott Joplin as ideal material for a type of march the public loved—a description march, in which the instruments recreated the sounds of an event. "The Great Crush Collision March" must have had it all, the shrieking whistles, the roaring trains, and the booming bass chord of the climactic crash.

A more lasting legacy is made up of the photographs Crush ordered taken. Six negatives are extant, and though the prints are not as clear as one might hope, they convey the anticipation, excitement, and fascination the Great Train Wreck inspired until the fatal moment. The uninjured photographers kept their wits and continued to shoot, documenting the cloud of deadly debris and its aftermath—photographs that seem to confirm the adage that then, as now, "there's no such thing as bad publicity."

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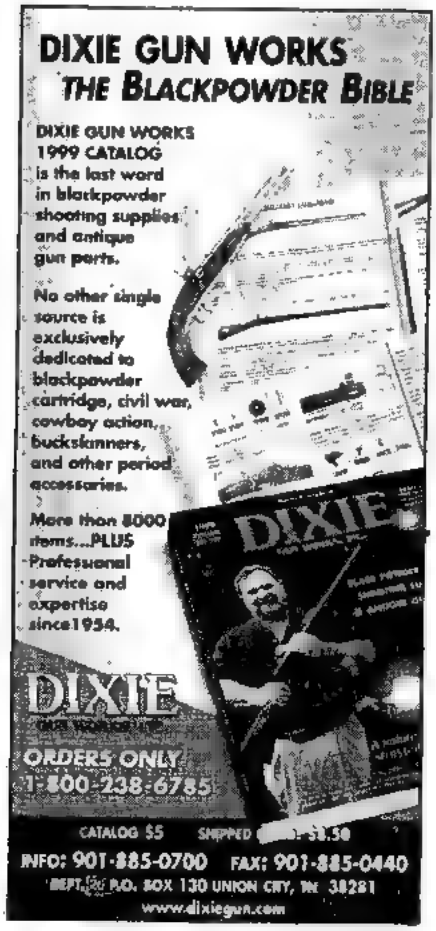
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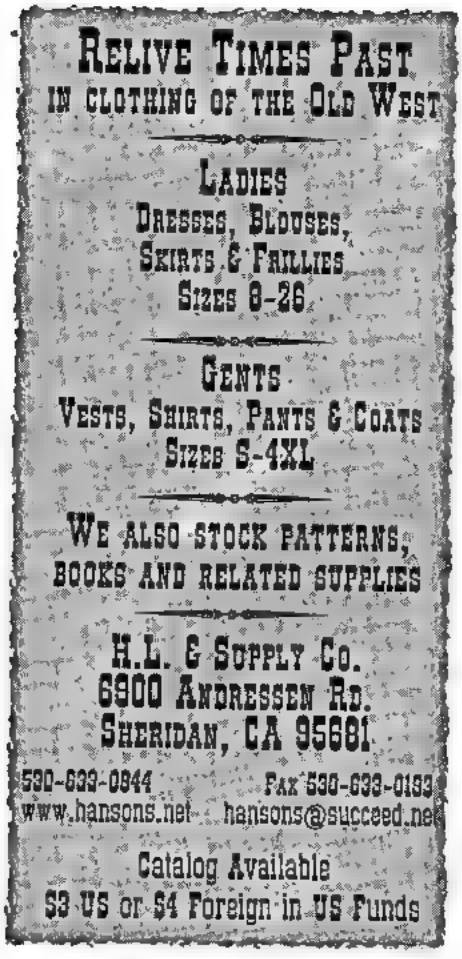

REVIEWS

Gold Rush Violence

Gold Dust and Gunsmoke: Tales of Gold Rush Outlaws, Gunfighters, Lawmen, and Vigilantes. By John Boessenecker. (John Wiley & Sons, Inc, 605 Third Ave, New York, New York 10158-0012. Photos, extensive notes. 384 pages. $30.00 Cloth:)

California's current Gold Rush Sesquicentennial is bringing us a number of excellent books. Most of them are broad overviews, think-pieces on the entire phenomenon of the rush-for-riches. But this new book by the author of *Badge and Buckshot* is a horse of a different hue, a dark horse among the more highly-touted (in advance) volumes of the Gold Rush's anniversary. It is one with a more narrow focus, the status of crime in the decade following the gold discovery of 1848.

But there is nothing narrow or shallow about Boessenecker's treatment of his subject. He has done an amazing job of researching newspapers, legal documents, diaries, and other sources, as well as making skilful use of the recent research of writers like William Secrest, Roger McGrath, Kevin Mullen, and James Varley. At the same time, he has carefully corrected errors in long-useful books by the likes of Joseph Henry Jackson and Frank Latta. The richness of his notes would indicate how zealous Boessenecker is as a researcher even if his fascinating details of homicides and other crimes were not as impressive as they are.

However, it is the author's talent for integrating his research findings into interesting narration and description that will make this collection of stories, the "tales" of his subtitle, appealing to most readers.

The author's coverage of what we might call the dark underside of the Gold Rush begins with the very first murder (1848), when there was a sort of false spring of little crime in the mining camps. All too soon, violence became epidemic in mining towns of the Mother Lode, in the few real cities, San Francisco and Sacramento, and—most surprisingly—in the so-called Cow Counties extending from Monterey to Los Angeles.

The author modifies the too-simplistic "ethnic" theory of early California crime, that Hispanic bandits were social revolutionaries fighting an *Anglo* establishment. True, oppression drove some young *Latinos* to crime as an "out." But they were neither patriots or Robin Hoods, since they stole and murdered among their brethren as well as among *Gringos*. In the main, it was a class conflict, more than a racial one. Another underdog element, poor immigrant Irish, contributed heavily to the criminal calendar.

On the other hand, many Irish entered law enforcement, and Boessenecker shows us Hispanic Californians who led or joined posses against *bandidos*. Too, as time went on, homicide became an "equal opportunity" business. As early as 1854, when Captain Jonathan Davis was attacked at Rocky Canyon, it was by a motley crew. Fresh from killing Chinese and Americans, the bandit gang that made a colossal mistake in picking on Davis was composed of two Americans, one Frenchman, two Brits, five Australians (Irish cons from New South Wales), and four Mexicans or *Californios*.

The author does not dwell on the one well-known bandit of the time, Joaquín Murrieta, but brings to light such rivals as Pío Linares and the Juan Flores-Pancho Daniel gang, whose murder of Sheriff Barton of Los Angeles led to the biggest manhunt in the history of the Far West. Of the good guys, the aforementioned Captain Davis stands out for, single-handedly, with just two six-shooters and a Bowie knife, reducing the criminal population by eleven, counting dead and wounded.

Boessenecker seems to have cov-

ered everything. Here you will find information on Judge Lynch and vigilantes, women in crime, prizefighters as thugs, crooked as well as honest lawmen, types of punishment besides hanging—banishment, flogging, ear cropping and face branding—duels, feuds, and Chinese tong wars.

The excellent narrative is followed by a statistical epilogue that convincingly rebuts the arguments of recent revisionist historians that, compared to the East, the Old West was not so wild in terms of crime in general and murder in particular.

Very well done, *Gold Dust and Gunsmoke* is a "must" for readers of books on outlaws and lawmen.—*Richard H. Dillon, Mill Valley, California.*

Camp's Notes

Custer & Company: Walter Camp's Notes on the Custer Fight. Edited by Bruce R. Liddic and Paul Harbaugh. (University of Nebraska Press, Bison Books, PO Box 880484, Lincoln, Nebraska 68588-0484. Photographs, maps, index. 200 pages. $13.00 Paper.)

Walter M. Camp (1867-1925) was a railroad man, editor for twenty-eight years of the *The Railway and Engineering Review*, and a man obsessed with the history of the Plains Indian Wars, the Great Sioux War of 1876 in particular. Camp spent his summers in the West, seeking to document precise occasions of battles and interviewing nearly two hundred Indian war veterans, both white and Native American. He became the most knowledgeable man of his time about the Indian Wars and had intended to write a history from his voluminous notes. Unfortunately, that ambition was never fulfilled.

In the years following Camp's death, his files became part of collections at Indiana University, Denver Public Library, Brigham Young University, and Little Bighorn National Monument, and many have remained in the hands of private collectors.

The first compilation of Camp's files, titled *Custer in '76: Walter Camp's Notes on the Custer Fight*, edited by Kenneth Hammer (Brigham Young University, 1976), became a must read for any serious student of Custerania. *Custer & Company*, a reprint of the edition first published by the Arthur H. Clark Company in 1995, certainly follows in that tradition.

Nineteen interviews relevant to the Sioux Indian Wars are contained in this volume. The accounts of thirteen enlisted men, two scouts, two interpreters, and two Indian participants are presented, each one a fascinating representation of oral history that adds another piece to the unfinished puzzle about Custer and his contemporaries.

Of special interest is the most extensive interview, that of Sergeant John Henly of B Troop, Seventh Cavalry, who recounts his experiences from 1870-1875 and 1878-1883, which includes his participation in the Yellowstone Expedition of 1873 and the Black Hills Expedition of 1874. Henley, who became proficient in the Sioux language, was working in the post trader store at Standing Rock Agency during Sitting Bull's surrender, and relates his conversations with that revered medicine man. Another interesting interview is scout Luther North, who along with his brother, Frank, formed a battalion of Pawnee Indians that saw action on the Plains from 1864-1877. His story of the Summit Springs Battle is particularly enlightening. Louis Bordeaux, the son of famed trader James Bordeaux, adds his insight as a witness to events surrounding the death of Crazy Horse. Additional interviews supply eyewitness details about the Reno-Benteen defense and other Little Bighorn related events.

The editors have provided excellent biographical information about those interviewed, and, with footnotes, have clarified and explained certain points of fact as well as referred to sources for additional reading.

This is a fine book that will satisfy both serious researchers and those with only a casual interest in the Plains Indian Wars.—*Thom Hatch, Calhan, Colorado.*

Post Card History

Nevada Post Card Album. By Robert Greenwood. (Fred Holabird Americana, 701 Gold Run Court, Reno, Nevada 89511. Photographs. 208 pages. $24.95 Paper.)

Old picture-postcards are the historian's newest secret weapon for the study of our past. Often, they are the only copies left to us of historic camera studies, the original prints and negatives lost long ago. Especially valuable are the true photographic postcards, such as those in this book. They are black and white photographs on glossy photo-"paper" (cards), not printed halftones or lithographs made from photos.

Greenwood arranges 373 well-reproduced views, taken between 1903 and 1928, alphabetically by town name. The starting date is that of the introduction of photographic postcards to the Basin and Range Country, the cut-off date marks the end of Nevada's second great mining boom, which began just after the turn of the century. Its stars were Tonopah and Goldfield, plus lesser camps like Bullfrog, Rhyolite, and Rawhide. The new bonanzas came just in time to rescue the Sagebrush State's faltering economy, for the old Comstock Lode mines of Civil War days were now played out.

To his great credit, the author is not content with perfunctory captions. After a brief introductory history of Nevada and its commercial photographers, he gives us a thumbnail history of every town pictured. These entries, though brief, are very informative. For example, you will learn that Tonopah was a silver strike and Goldfield the last real gold "find." You will discover that Ely's gold petered out, but rescue came in the form of copper. And, news to this student of western history, Nevada actually has one river that does not end ignominiously in a sink. The Owyhee drains "into the Pacific!" (via the Snake and Columbia rivers, of course).

Greenwood has sought out pic-

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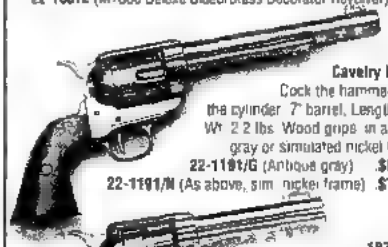

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ture-postcards in private collections as well as in libraries and museums. Many of the images, of course, are mining scenes, or town panoramas, main streets, and "portraits" of business buildings. But others are of forts and Indian reservations, hot springs, saloons, dance halls, gambling dens, a Chinese joss house, locomotives, railroad stations and depots, and freighting wagons and stagecoaches. Exciting events were always captured by these little-known, sometimes anonymous, local cameramen—prizefights, races, dignitaries (Teddy Roosevelt), such disasters as floods and fires, even a lynching. Some of the most interesting cards are "genre" pictures of social history—grammar school kids, citizens picnicking, Indians gambling. This writer's favorite, however, is a frontal view of a herd of whiteface Herefords being driven down the main drag of Gardnerville, on its way to summer ranges in the Sierra Nevada.

This is no souvenir, and is more than just a pictorial guide to ghost towns like Aurora, Belmont, and Sutro. It is a town-by-town pictorial history, albeit brief, of the entire state and absolutely essential for anyone seriously interested in Nevadiana.—*Richard H. Dillon, Mill Valley, California.*

The Healys

They Called It Cimarron: Settling the West-Padres Island to "No Man's Land." Edited by Frank Dale Healy, IV, and Deborah L. Dosh-Healy. (DDH Press, 7625 E. Calle los Arboles, Tucson, Arizona 85750. Photographs, illustrations. 175 pages. $19.95 Cloth.)

"It never occurred to me I would fail...."

This statement, uttered by Frank Belle Dow Healy, characterized the belief of every member of the Healy family. At the time he expressed that thought it was 1905; the place was the Oklahoma Panhandle. He was one of a long line of pioneers who braved a rough land with confidence in their ability to succeed.

The Healys found ranching success in Texas and Oklahoma, having started their ranching enterprise on Padre Island off the coast of Texas, before relocating in the Oklahoma Panhandle in the early twentieth century. The founding father of the KK Ranch, William Healy, had earlier been a successful businessman in Boston, Massachusetts. After a fire wiped him out he decided to seek a new fortune elsewhere and bought a ranch on Padre Island in 1875.

From Padre Island, the Healys relocated in the Neutral Strip of Oklahoma, the "panhandle" section just above the Texas panhandle where the Healy ranch prospered. William Healy died in late 1882; sons George and Nathaniel carried on while brother Frank branched out to become a deputy marshal and brand inspector. Thanks to his dedication, the "No Man's Land" of Oklahoma became law-abiding a little sooner.

They Called It Cimarron is the collection of memoirs of Healy family members. Frank Dale Healy, IV, in 1991 became interested in learning specifics about vague stories he remembered hearing about his family's origins. Fortunately much material was located: memoirs written in long hand by his forebears, newspaper articles clipped from forgotten newspapers, photographs, and other minutiae. This work is a compilation of those preserved records of a successful pioneer family that lived much of the entire frontier experience.

The memoirs gathered into this slim volume reveal the lives of people without formal education but who recorded their recollections honestly and without added dramatics. The big names of western history are for the most part absent from this work, although Tom Nixon and "Mysterious Dave" Mather earn a mention. These people stuck close to their land and their herds and managed to avoid the flashiness that resulted in the gunfights and feuds of many a western movie or novel. The writing is fresh and vivid. One only wishes there had been more preserved.—*Chuck Parsons, Luling, Texas.*

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Frenchy McCormick and Billy Dixon

Back in 1985 the Kansas Corral of the Westerners, in its fifth annual publication, *The Prairie Scout*, published my article discussing the photograph shown here. Previously, the individuals in the photo had been identified as everyone from Belle Starr to Jesse James, Wyatt Earp, Billy the Kid, as well as other impossible combinations. The seated figure at left was identified as famed buffalo hunter Billy Dixon, identified by his widow Olive K. Dixon. The identity of the others is debatable, but the figure standing behind Billy Dixon is undoubtedly a woman.

I recently received a letter from Leslie Monder, with no return address, suggesting that the lone lady in the photo could be the famed "mystery woman" of old Tascosa, Texas, known as Frenchy McCormick. This is possible, as Billy Dixon was in the area. The men could all be buffalo hunters, as was Dixon, but the woman featured is *not* Billy the Kid, as some have claimed, nor is she Belle Starr. I would welcome comments from our readers.

Author's Collection

Billy Dixon, seated left, with an unidentified group of buffalo hunters, in the 1870s. The lady standing behind Dixon is *not* Billy the Kid or Belle Starr, as previous writers have claimed.

Outlaw John Gross

R.D. Gross, Freeman, South Dakota, requests any information on gunmen John Gross.

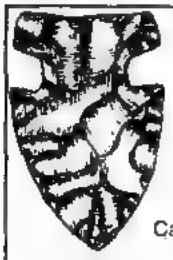
Gross is a mystery figure. His real name may have been August Groos, but he entered the Texas prison system under the name of John Gunter, which may have been his real name. He first appears with rustler John Selman in Shackleford County, Texas. When vigilantes got too close to the rustlers, he left the country with John and Tom Selman, ending up in the peaceful hills of Lincoln County, New Mexico.

Here the Selmans formed what was called "Selman's Scouts," a band of marauders that included Gross and Gus Gildea. They raped, robbed, burned, and generally created a swath of terror and destruction in that corner of New Mexico Territory.

When Lincoln County got too hot the gang, or at least some of them, returned to Texas where they ranged in the Fort Davis area of West Texas. One notable crime was the May 19, 1880, robbery of the Sender & Siebenborn store at Fort Davis. C.L. Nevill and a squad of Texas Rangers investigated and determined the thieves were Jesse Evans; Bud Graham, alias Ace Carr; and Charles Graham, alias Charles Graves. Gross acted as lookout.

The Rangers caught up with the gang on July 13. In a running gun battle, gang member Charles Graham and Ranger George R. "Red" Bingham were killed.

Jesse Evans stood trial for his part in the store robbery and was sentenced to Huntsville, Texas, state prison for ten years each on charges



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of murder and robbery. He entered Huntsville on December 1, 1880, but escaped on May 23, 1882. John Gross was convicted on April 11, 1882, on a charge of manslaughter. He was received at Rusk State Prison in Cherokee County, Texas, on April 24 as prisoner #873.

The record shows he was twenty-four years old, 5' 10", 165 pounds, fair complexion, gray eyes, and light hair. He had a scar on his left nipple and naval, was not married, used tobacco, was temperate, had a limited education, gave his occupation as "stock raiser," and was a native of Alabama. Gross was discharged on February 13, 1884. What happened to him after his discharge has not yet been determined.

R.K. DeArment wrote a related article, "The Great Outlaw Confederacy," published in the September 1990 *True West*.

Garrett and Terry

Readers sometimes ask questions worlds apart in terms of subject matter as well as distance. Two interesting examples come from Frank Hall, Jackson, Michigan. He has read much on Billy the Kid and Pat Garrett and asks: "Pat Garrett took [Billy's] coffin by railroad but refused to open the coffin for viewing," and "The night Pat shot Billy he would not let deputies view the body." Why?

Mr. Hall's source is not made clear, but it is incorrect. After Billy was killed his body lay in Pedro Maxwell's bedroom until dawn. Various people stayed in the room during the night with candles burning; this was religious custom only. The next day the body was taken to Maxwell's carpenter shop while Domingo Swabacker built the coffin and Jesus Silva dug the grave. Garrett did not move the body anywhere via train. Certainly dozens viewed the body before it was placed in the coffin. Garrett did not prevent his deputies or anyone else from viewing the body, as there was no reason to.

Mr. Hall also inquires about a General Terry, who had nothing to do with Garrett or the Kid. Al-

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though there was more than one General Terry, the best known remains Alfred Howe Terry of Connecticut, born on November 10, 1827. He was commissioned a colonel of the Second Connecticut Infantry at the start of the Civil War and ended the conflict with the rank of major general. He was commissioned brigadier general on January 15, 1865.

From 1866-1868, and then from 1873-1886, he commanded the Department of Dakota. Terry missed the Battle at the Little Bighorn because he was elsewhere at the time. It fell to Terry to come upon the battlefield and bury the dead. Historian Dan Thrapp says the task was a "difficult job but was efficiently completed by Terry."

In October 1877, Terry was leader of the commission to confer with Sitting Bull in an effort to get him to cross back into the United States from Canada and live on a reservation. Terry was unsuccessful in this task. By 1886, he became a major general and commanded the Division of the Missouri with headquarters in Chicago. He retired not long after and died on December 16, 1890.

Bill Carlisle in Kemmerer?

Janet E. Holwuttle, Diamondville, Wyoming, is attempting to record the history of her neighboring town of Kemmerer, situated between the Bridger Teton National Forest and the Wasatch National Forest in the southwest corner of the state. She has been told that Old West train robber Bill Carlisle once lived there and requests confirmation.

Bill Carlisle (his real name was William L. Cottrell) did live in Kemmerer, although his story is more twentieth century than "Old West." Carlisle robbed his first train at nearby Green River on February 9, 1916, but must have been disappointed in the amount of loot he obtained. Getting a few dollars may have bought him a few good meals and a shave, but it still carried the death penalty upon conviction. Carlisle was finally captured but served time instead of stepping on the gallows. His career in crime amounted to robbing four trains of the Union Pacific line—single handed, which may have set some type of record. Later in life, after being pardoned, he operated a cigar store in one of the Kemmerer hotels. He later returned to his home state of Pennsylvania, where he died on June 19, 1964. His autobiography, entitled *Bill Carlisle, Lone Bandit*, was published in 1946. Ramon F. Adams describes it as an "honest autobiography of the last of the lone train robbers."

Carlisle was featured on the cover of the June 1993 *True West*, highlighting Murray L. Carroll's article, "The Last Cowboy Bandit."

If you have a question, send it to Chuck Parsons, Western Publications, P.O. Box 2107, Stillwater, OK 74076. Please keep questions brief. Sign your full name and address, including zip code. Names will be published if question is used. Space limitations July not permit us to use all questions. Due to the volume of mail, we cannot forward correspondence to people whose questions appear in "Answer Man."

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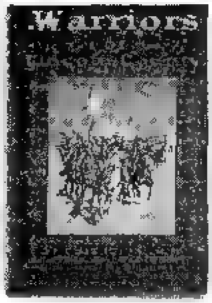

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In the July issue of True West:

The Mysterious Shooting of Matt Burts. **By Harold L. Edwards.** Ex con-turned stock detective Matt Burts engages in one last pistol duel in a remote California cabin.

Gathering Them In!!. **By Roger Myers.** Fort County Kansas Sheriff Bat Masterson scours the snowy plains of Kansas, Oklahoma, and Texas for "Dirty Dave" Rudabaugh and his band of would-be train robbers.

Phantom of the Forest. **By Allen P. Bristow.** After the murder of twins John and William Bauer, madman John Tornow draws lawmen into one of the biggest manhunts in Washington state history.

True West *Legends: Commodore Perry Owens.* By Larry Willis. Working his Winchester fast as lightening, C.W. Owens becomes a force to recon with during the Peasant Valley War.

Look for the July 1999 True West on newsstands July 1, 1999.

Wild Old Days

The Cowboy Who Grew Up To Be A Conductor

By Richard W. O'Donnell

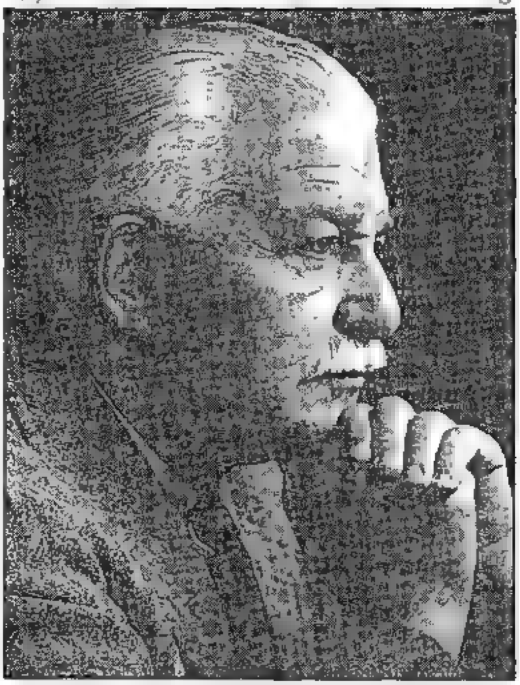
The world lost a great cowboy, when the late Arthur Fiedler, who made the Boston Pops what it is today, decided to become a musician.

As a lad, when not practicing his violin, the legendary conductor loved to read what was called "the penny dreadfuls." At least, that's what most parents called them. These pulp magazines featured tales about popular western heroes. The younger generation devoured them.

"Every youngster in our neighborhood, in Brookline—the boys, I mean—was a cowboy," Fiedler once told an interviewer. "We used hammer and nails to make wooden guns. Then we chased around firing imaginary bullets at each other. I have wonderful memories of those days. All of the kids dreamed of heading West, and becoming cowboys."

"I once shook hands with Buffalo Bill Cody," he added. "That was one of the proudest moments of my life. I've met a lot of famous people since then, but meeting Buffalo Bill was one of the biggest things that ever happened to me."

Fiedler, who died in 1979 during his fiftieth year as conductor of the Boston Pops, once ran away from home, to become a part of Buffalo Bill's famous Wild West Show. "I figured I'd make a great cowboy," he said. "I had a strong constitution, and my grandparents had taught me not to baby myself. I loved riding horses, and plenty of fresh air. I wasn't afraid of hard work either. I figured I had what it takes to make a good cowboy."



Author's Collection

Arthur Fiedler, conductor of the Boston Pops, realized a childhood dream of running away and joining Buffalo Bill's Wild West.

He paused for moment, then declared: "Of course, I was only about eleven, when I ran away that time. My career with Buffalo Bill's show didn't last too long."

Fiedler, it should be noted, didn't run very far, and he was gone for less than twenty-four hours. His parents had the police out looking for him, and he received, what can best be described as "a stern welcome," when he returned home from his trip "out West."

Recalled Fiedler, "It happened when Buffalo Bill came to town with all his horses, and all his Indians. I knew they were putting up the big top on Huntington Avenue in Boston, not far from my home. I wanted to meet Buffalo Bill."

But young Fiedler's father, Emmanuel, who was the first

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violinist with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, refused to allow his son to head for the circus grounds. He wanted the boy to stay home and practice the violin, and the lad did just that.

Still, practicing the violin wasn't much fun for Arthur on that particular day. He yearned to be roaming the frontier down the road. He wanted to see all those westerners. As he labored away on his violin, he could hear the tom-toms throbbing.

"It was while I was practicing that I decided to run away, and spend the rest of my life herding cattle," said the Pops conductor. "Right then and there, I wasn't interested in playing the violin for the rest of my life."

Once he had concluded his practice, young Arthur went to bed for the night. He couldn't sleep though. At three o'clock, he was wide awake. He got up and dressed, and tiptoed out of the house. In the dark of night, he raced through the streets to Huntington Avenue. Young Arthur was on his way to be a cowboy.

He was welcomed at Buffalo Bill's camping grounds with open arms. They let him work with the pinto ponies, and lug water to the animals. He was even allowed to inspect the feathered headgear of the Indians, and sit in on a tribal ceremony at dawn. All things considered, the future musical great had a grand time.

Back at the Fiedler home, Arthur's parents discovered their son was missing. In short order, neighbors joined in the search for the boy. The Huntington Avenue grounds were checked, but Arthur was not spotted. He took cover, when some familiar faces appeared on the scene.

When the search failed to locate Arthur, his father headed for the local police station to report his son missing. In those days, a missing youngster was not considered a routine matter. Route patrolmen were notified, and a systematic search, both in Brookline and neighboring Boston, was launched for the runaway.

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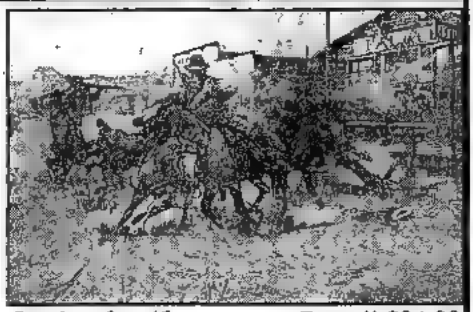

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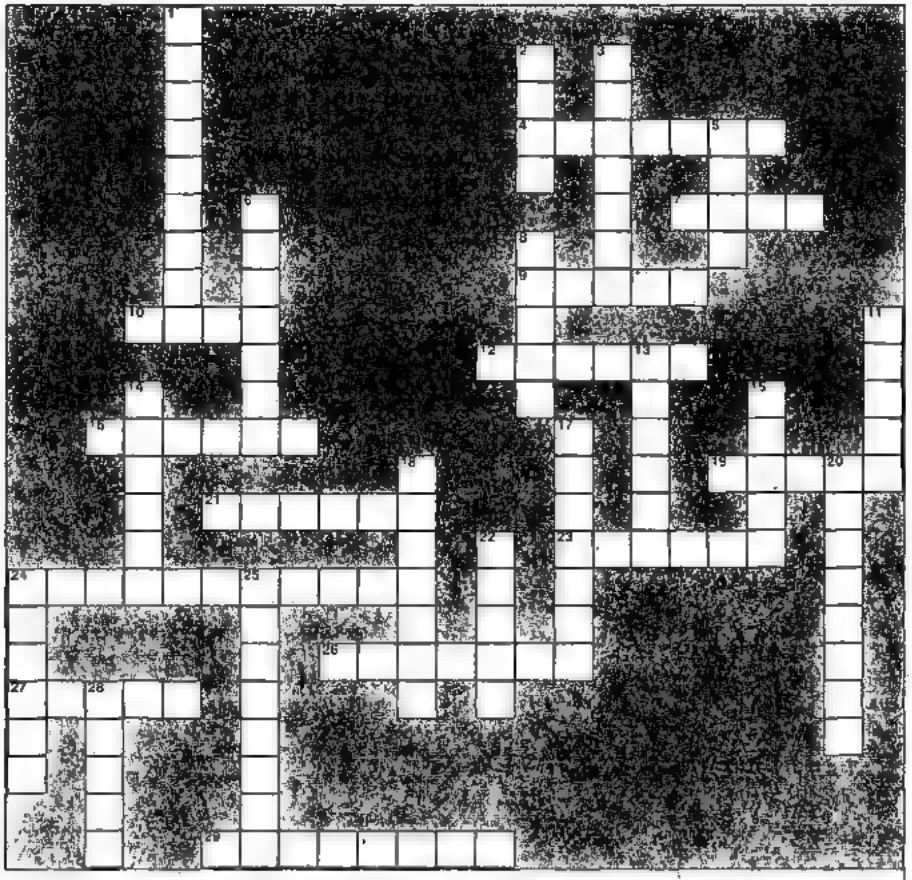
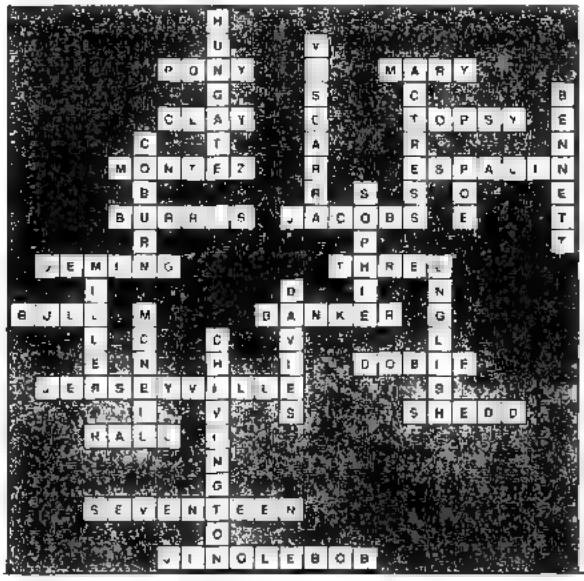


Across

3. Author of *Doc Susie*
7. Benjamin _____ Thorn
9. Pink Smith's alias
10. Metal mined from the Mollie Kathleen
12. W.C. Child bought his ranch land from _____
16. _____ Musselman
19. Item buried in No. 999's sandbox
21. W.C. Child's ranch is in _____, MT
23. Instrument David Crockett played
24. State Charles McKinney was born
26. General _____ López de Santa Anna
27. New Orleans _____
29. Edward Burleson's age when he fought his first battle

Down

1. Outlaw that tried to Kill Ben Thorn
2. Katy wreck occurred 16 miles north of _____, Texas
3. Mollie Kathleen _____
5. San Francisco's captain of detectives
6. Arthur _____, cowboy turned conductor
8. Edward Burleson's aunt
11. Organizer of the Katy train wreck
13. _____ Burleson
14. Encinal depot master
15. Photographer who lost his eye at the Katy wreck
17. Bill Dixon hunted _____
18. San _____
20. David _____
22. The Priest's House was built with this, not adobe
24. Author of *Battle of the Rosebud*
25. Name of the only Anglo woman at the Alamo
28. The number of sides to W.C. Child's ranch house



Solution to last month's puzzle.

As for Arthur, he had himself a great time.

During the day, he actually met the fabled Buffalo Bill and shook hands with the great man. He saw the big show during the afternoon, "on the house." It was his payment for helping out with the animals. It was a day the young man would store away in his memory book forever.

"It was an experience I never forgot," said Fiedler. "It was an experience I have always treasured."

The great adventure came to an end when a route patrolman, while checking out the grounds, came across the lad, after the evening performance.

To tell the truth, by then, young Arthur was in the mood to resume his career as a practicing violinist. He was hungry, his stomach was groaning, and he yearned for some good home cooking and a nice warm bed.

Little did he expect the warm welcome he would receive.

"Guess where I've been," he called out, as he came through the front door.

His mother didn't seem to care, "Go to your room!" she ordered. "Your father will see you, when he gets back from the police station."

Recalled Fiedler: "Boy, did I catch it. I was under house arrest for a week."

Years later, in the 1930s, Fiedler was asked by a magazine to name his favorite songs.

"The old songs are always the best songs," he said. His list included "Over There," "Brother, Can You Spare a Dime?," and "Cigolo," among others.

He also had "The Cowboy's Lament" and "Home on the Range" on his list. His albums included many western favorites, including one that featured the music from early TV western shows.

Arthur Fiedler's dream of becoming a cowboy never did come true. Still, millions of music lovers, including quite a few cowboys, are glad it didn't.

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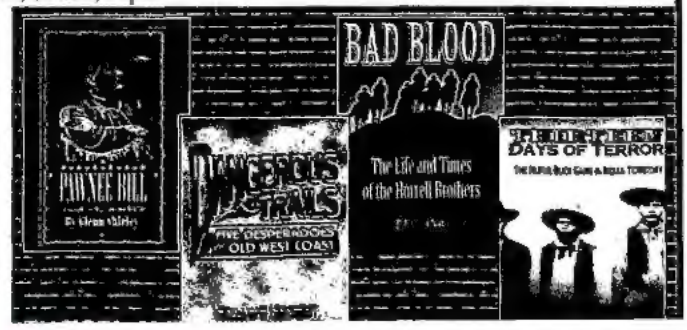

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